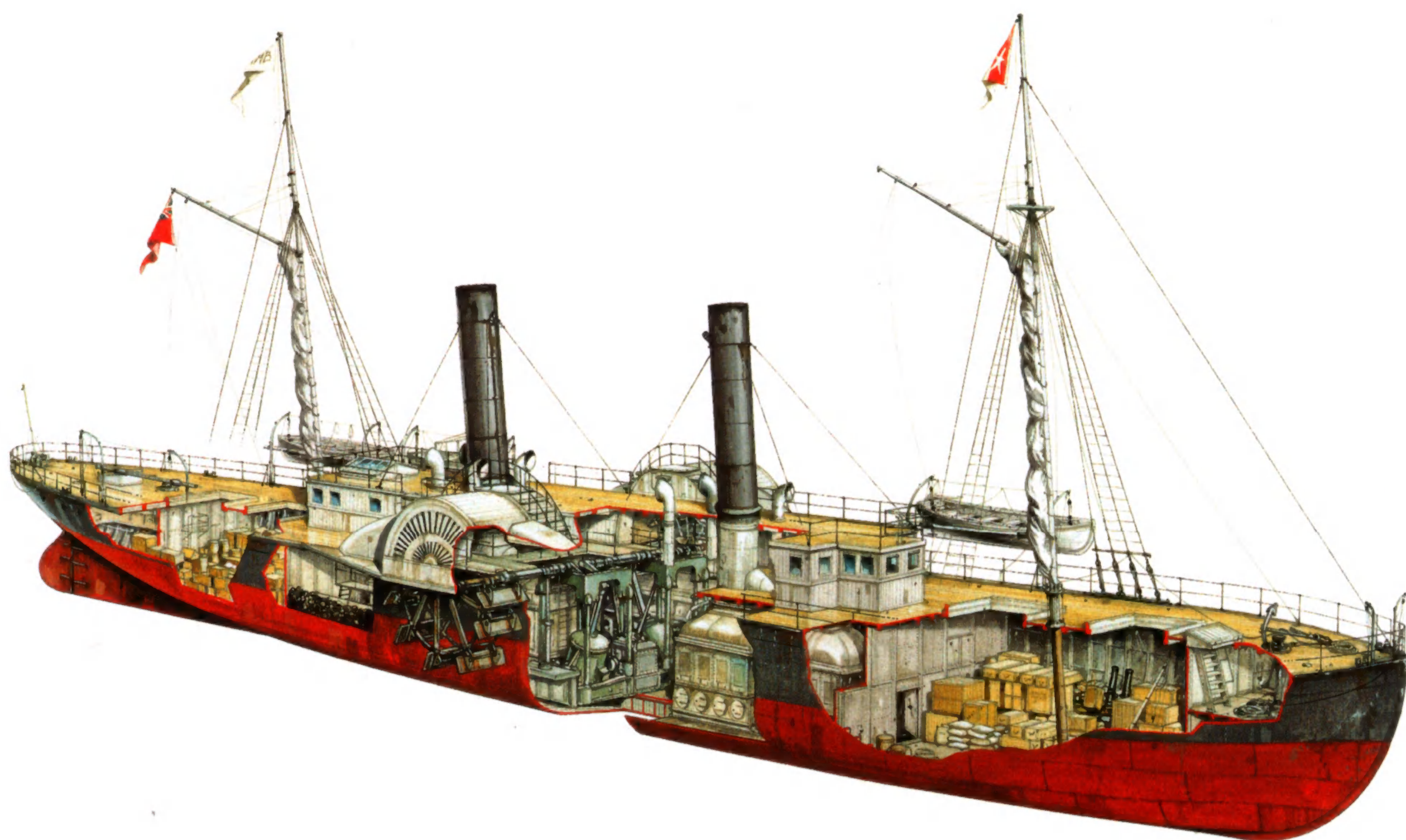


New Vanguard

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# Confederate Blockade Runner 1861–65



Angus Konstam • Illustrated by Tony Bryan





Angus Konstam hails from the Orkney Islands of Scotland, and is the author of over 40 books, many of which are published by Osprey. His other Civil War titles include *Confederate Ironclad 1861–65*, *Union Monitor 1861–65*, *Confederate Raider 1861–65* and *Hampton Roads 1862*. Formerly the Curator of Weapons in the Royal Armouries at the Tower of London, he also served as the Chief Curator of the Mel Fisher Maritime Museum in Key West, Florida. He is currently based in Edinburgh, Scotland where he pursues a full-time career as a historian.



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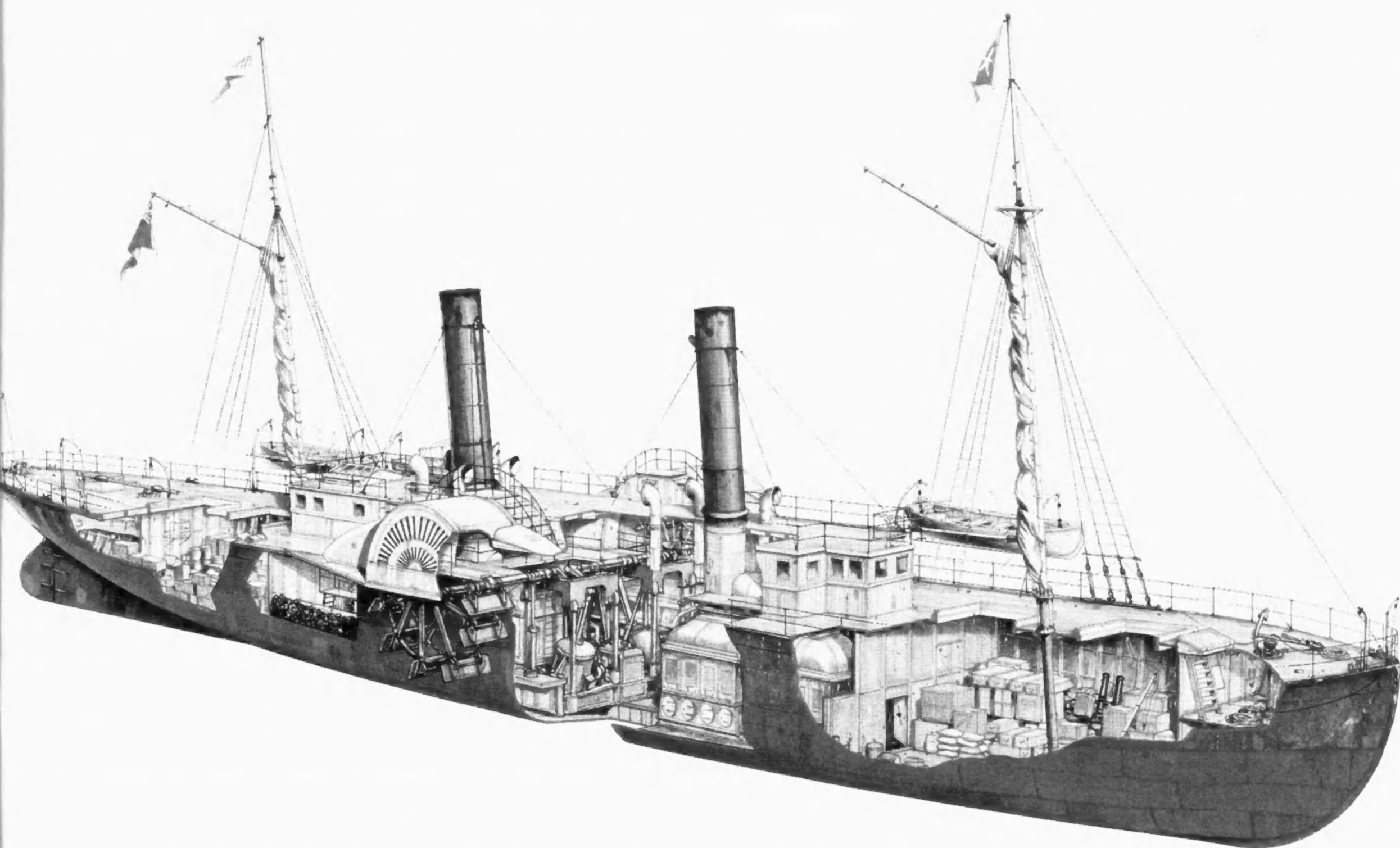
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# CONFEDERATE BLOCKADE RUNNER 1861-65

## The Chase

Freed from the lingering chase, in devious ways,  
Upon the swelling tides, swiftly the "Lilian" glides,  
Through hostile shells and eager foemen past;  
The lynx-eyed pilot gazing through the haze,  
And engines straining, fair hope dawns at last.  
Now falls in billows deep the welcome night,  
Upon white sands below; while signal lamps aglow,  
Seek out Fort Fisher's distant answering gleams,  
The blockade runner's keen, supreme delight,  
Dear Dixie Land, the haven of our dreams!

James Sprunt *Tales of the Cape Fear Blockade*

## INTRODUCTION

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In the historical study of the Civil War, coverage of the naval campaign is scant compared to the wealth of published information covering the battles and campaigns fought on land. In the few available histories of the naval war between the states, little attention is paid to the blockade runners, as their actions lacked the drama and obvious strategic import of the intermittent clashes between Union and Confederate warships. Most students of Civil War history are aware of the naval battles fought at Hampton Roads, New Orleans, and Mobile Bay, and they might even be aware of the other important engagements fought on the Mississippi River, and on the rivers and in the estuaries of the Confederacy's Atlantic seaboard. Surprisingly few are aware of the importance of the blockade runners, and the contribution they made to the Confederate cause.

The Confederate economy was agrarian, and the South was largely unable to provide its armies with a reliable supply of ordnance, ammunition, uniforms, equipment and even provisions. The survival of the Confederacy therefore depended on importing these vital war materials in order to augment the limited home-based sources of production. From the outset of the war, the Union Navy instituted a blockade of the Confederate coastline, and as the war progressed this blockade tightened. Despite this, many ship-owners on both sides of the Atlantic saw this as an opportunity, as the profits to be made by running the blockade were immense. Ports such as New Orleans, Galveston, Mobile, Savannah, Charleston, and Wilmington became vital sources of supply, and during the war blockade runners imported sufficient quantities of war materials that the Confederate Army was able to remain in the field, despite chronic shortages at home. As the war progressed, purpose-built blockade runners began to appear, and for

the rest of the war these sleek, fast vessels engaged in a cat-and-mouse game with the blockading Union Navy. This study of blockade runners provides both an account of the evolution of these strategically important vessels and a brief summary of their *modus operandi*. Above all, it describes the vessels themselves, which pushed the contemporary boundaries of ship design and marine engineering to their limits.

### **Background: the blockade**

On April 19, 1861, just six days after the fall of Fort Sumter, President Lincoln announced the establishment of a naval blockade of the secessionist states. Historians have argued the legality of this declaration ever since. In the realm of international law, the use of the word blockade implied a tacit recognition that the Confederate States of America constituted a foreign power, rather than a section of an existing country which was in a state of rebellion. Whatever the legalities of Lincoln's blockade, it helped define Union naval strategy throughout the war. In late April, the Union's Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, defined the role of the Navy as follows:

"The closing of all the insurgent ports along the coast of nearly 3000 miles, in the form and under the exacting regulations of an international blockade ... the Organization of combined naval and military expeditions to operate in force against various points of the southern coast ... on the Mississippi and its tributaries, and the active pursuit of the piratical cruisers which might escape the vigilance of the blockading force."

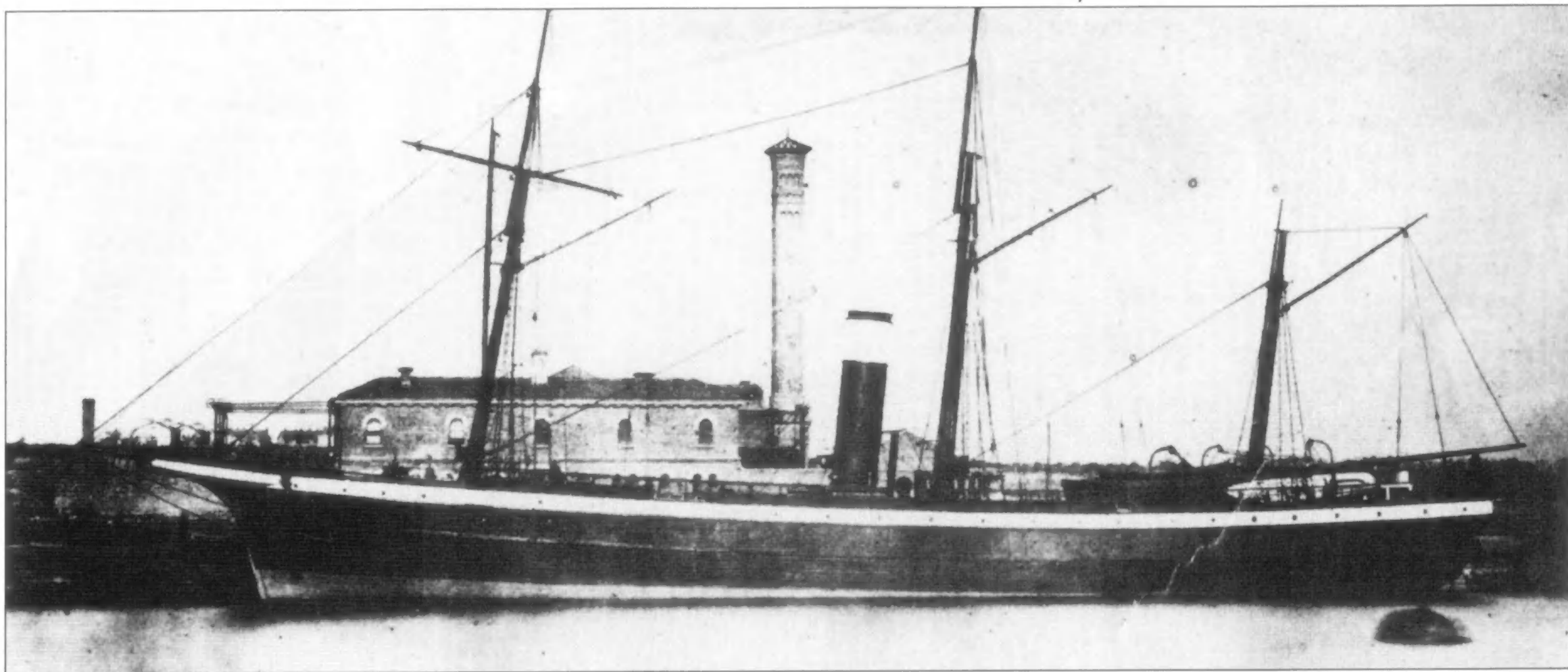
The blockade formed a major part of the so-called "Anaconda plan" developed by General Winfield Scott, which envisaged an economic stranglehold of the Confederacy by a blockading fleet, and the physical dismemberment of the Southern States by the seizure of the Mississippi River. When the war began, the US Navy was in no position to do anything more than institute a token blockade. Over the coming months Gideon Welles ordered the purchase and conversion of hundreds of steam-powered vessels, creating an extemporized fleet which was large and powerful enough to turn Lincoln's token blockade into an effective one. Welles also instituted an ambitious ship-building program, creating purpose-built warships which were fast enough to intercept enemy blockade runners and high-seas raiders.

In early May only three Union warships were available to blockade Norfolk, Charleston, and Pensacola, but by the end of the year Welles had some 160 blockading warships at his disposal. This number increased steadily throughout the war, as newly built warships joined the fleet, and captured Confederate vessels, including blockade runners, were pressed into service against their former owners. By the end of 1864 over 470 Union blockading warships were in service, a force large enough to make blockade running an extremely dangerous pursuit. One by one the ports used by blockade runners fell into Northern hands until, by the start of 1865, only Wilmington and Galveston remained under Confederate



**John Newland Maffitt (1819–86)** from Wilmington, North Carolina, was both an acclaimed Confederate naval officer and then a highly successful blockade runner, commanding the *Lillian* and *Owl*, based in Wilmington. (North Carolina Maritime Museum, Beaufort, NC)





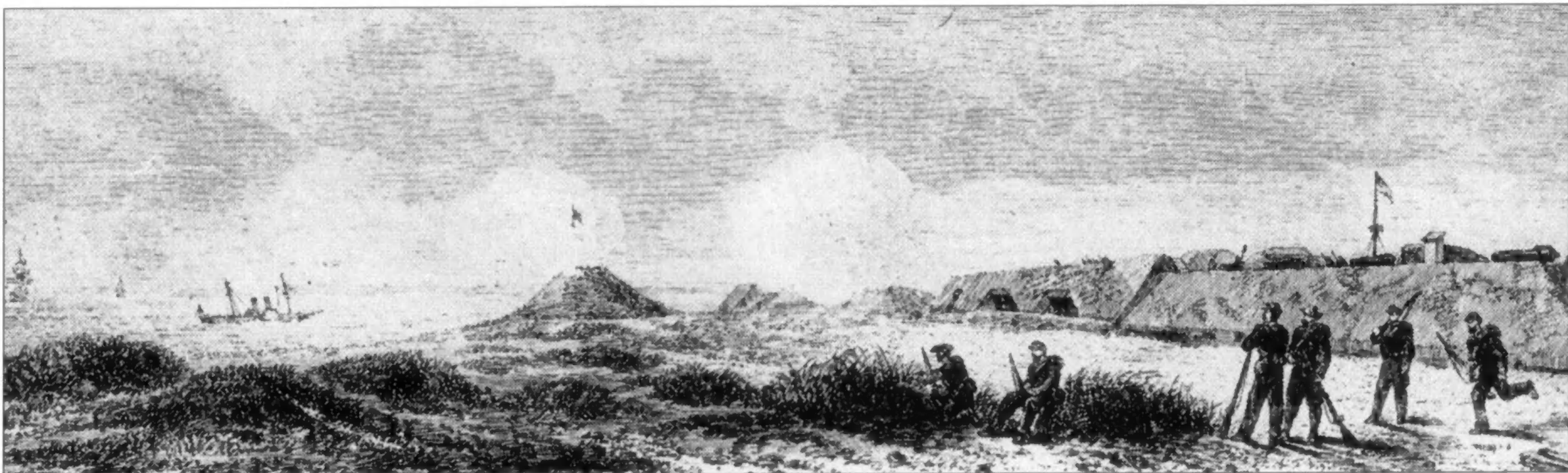
**The Confederate commerce raider CSS Sumter was decommissioned in Gibraltar in 1862, and in December she was purchased for use as a blockade runner, being renamed the Gibraltar. Her ultimate fate is unknown. (Clyde Hensley Collection, Fernandina, FL)**

**The blockade runner Hansa, running under the protection of the guns of Fort Fisher, near Wilmington. Close cooperation between blockade runners and the fort's garrison was responsible for many successful operations during the war. From Harper's Weekly. (Stratford Archive, London)**

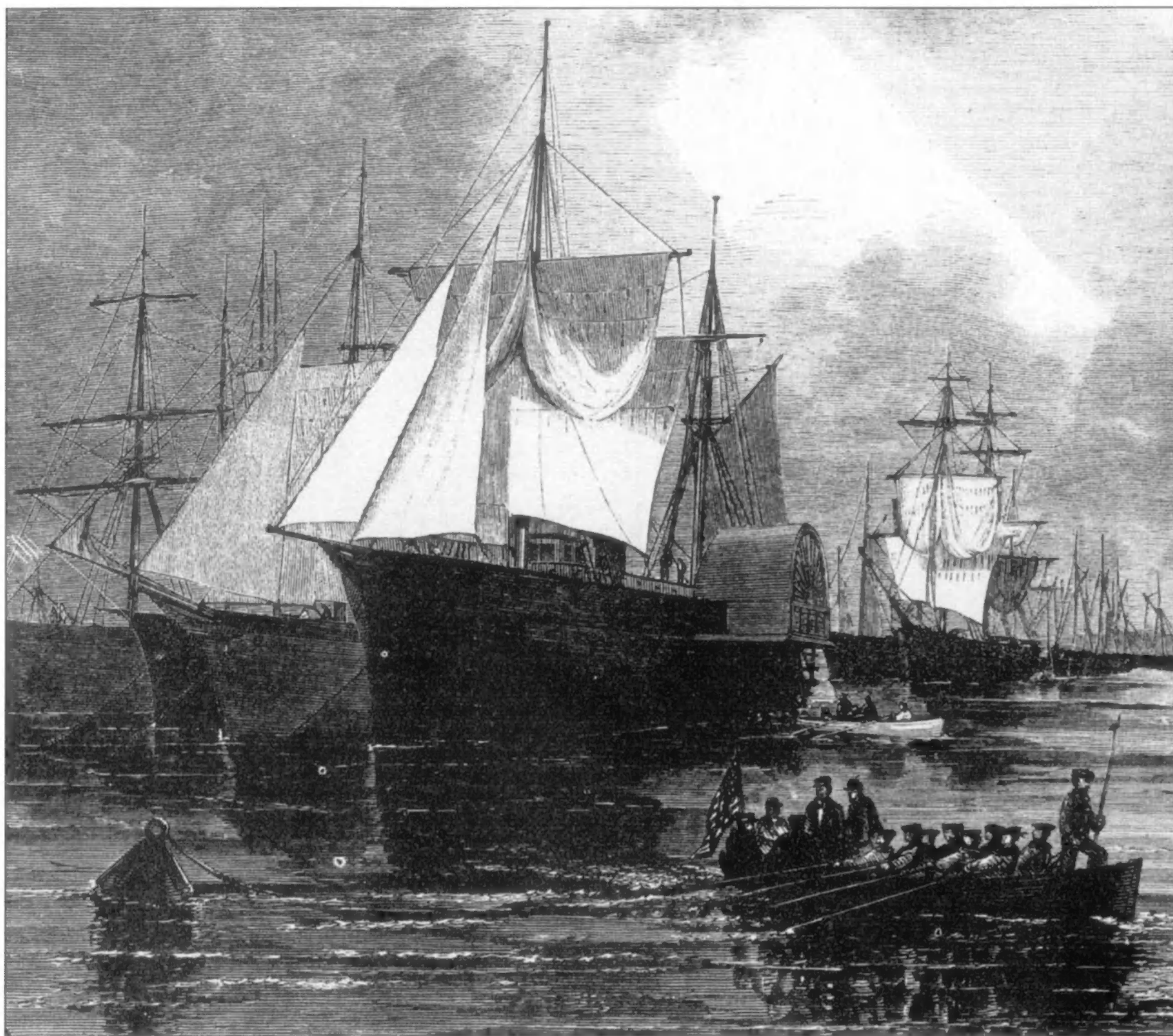
control. The fall of Wilmington on February 25, 1865, (five weeks after the fall of Fort Fisher) effectively cut the last lifeline to the outside world, and ended the blockade-running operations which had played such a significant role in the survival of the Confederacy.

On June 23, 1865, the blockade officially ended. During its four years of operation approximately 1,300 attempts had been made to run it, by around 350 blockade runners. Of these, all but 300 of the attempts were successful. The Union blockading fleet succeeded in capturing some 136 blockade runners, and ensured the destruction of 85 more. These blockade runners managed to smuggle some 400,000 bales of cotton out of Confederate ports during the war. Although this was less than 20 percent of the annual pre-war cotton exports from Southern ports it nevertheless represented a significant revenue source for the Confederacy, allowing its agents to purchase vital war materials abroad.

Although no detailed study of Confederate military purchases has been published, they had a significant effect on the Confederate war effort. During the last six months of 1864 alone, blockade runners entering Carolinian ports succeeded in bringing in some 50,000 rifles, 43 pieces of artillery, enough lead and saltpeter to make 10 million rounds of small-arms ammunition, and enough shoes, uniforms and blankets to clothe the entire Army of Northern Virginia. In addition some 1.5 million pounds of meat were imported, ensuring that Robert





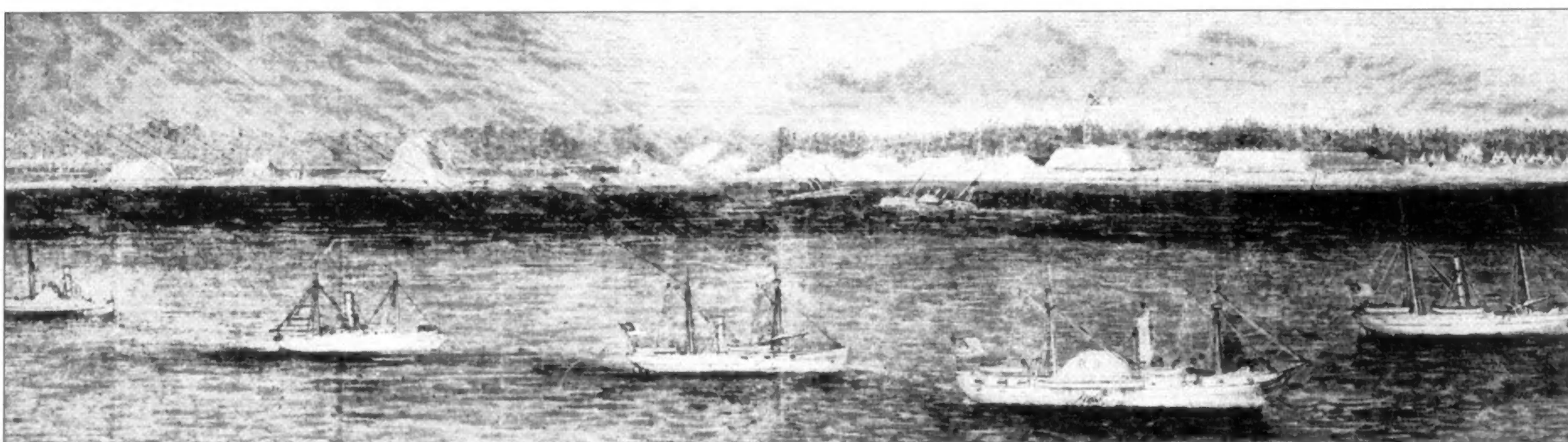


**Captured blockade runners at anchor off New York in 1862. The vessel in the foreground is the British sidewheel steamer *Elizabeth*, while the remainder of the prizes appear to be sailing ships. From *Harper's Weekly*. (Clyde Hensley Collection, Fernandina, FL)**

E. Lee's men would not starve in their trenches around Petersburg. In effect, the blockade runners kept the Confederate armies in the field.

Critics have described the Union blockade as a sieve, and while the numbers above support this view, it is important to remember that the blockade's effectiveness increased dramatically as the war progressed, though the number of blockade runners increased too. For example, in 1862, only six vessels ran through the blockade into Wilmington (and other smaller North Carolina ports). During 1863 this total increased to 125 vessels, and in 1864 some 180 blockade runners arrived in Wilmington. While a handful of blockade runners made several successful runs, most were wrecked or captured after no more than four runs, or two round trips. Blockade running was a risky business, and the vigilance of the Union fleet ensured that the risks increased as the war progressed. Statistically, the naval blockade was highly successful. When combined with the strategy of the systematic reduction and capture of Confederate ports, it ensured ultimate victory for the Union.

**The Union blockade off Wilmington in 1864, viewed from Fort Fisher. The mouth of the Cape Fear River was difficult to block due to shifting sandbars, local tidal conditions and the protection of shore batteries. (North Carolina Maritime Museum, Beaufort, NC)**





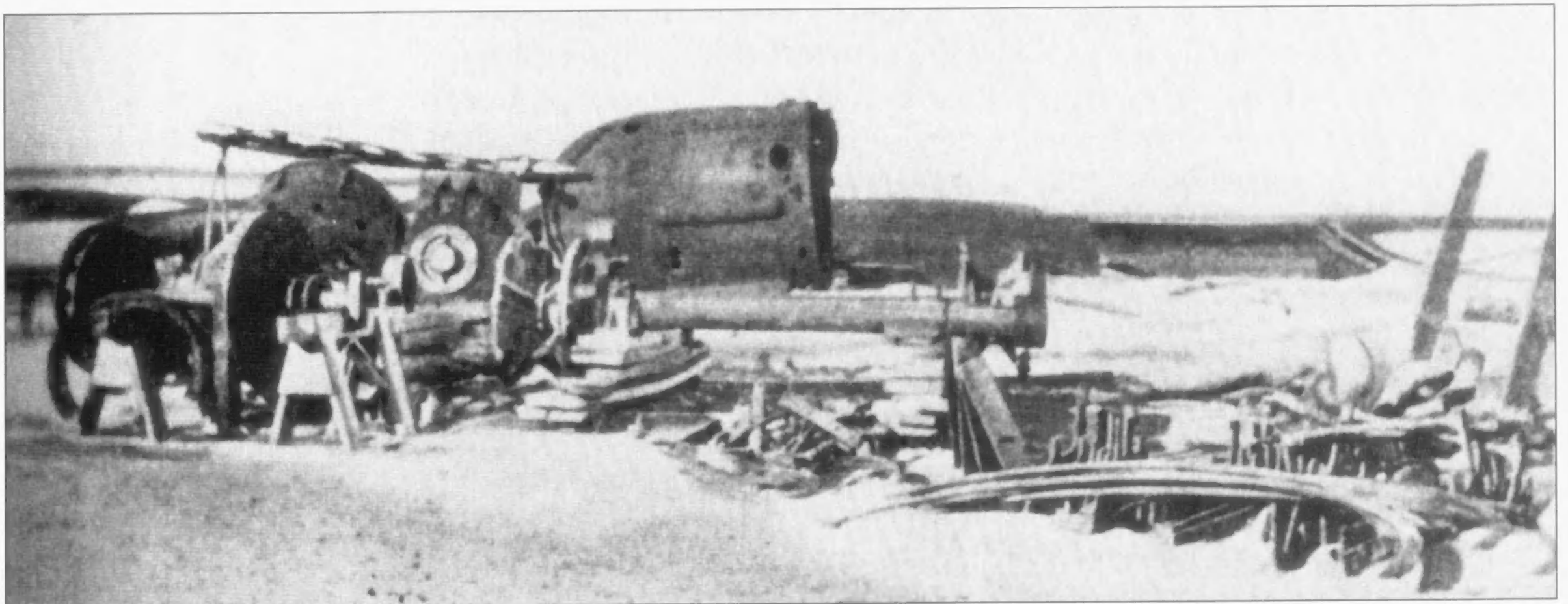
# DEVELOPMENT

## Early blockade runners

Before the outbreak of war, the Southern states had virtually no steam-powered merchant marine. When President Lincoln announced the imposition of the blockade, neutral shipping was given 15 days to leave Southern ports. In 1861, the bulk of cotton cargoes exported was shipped by foreign vessels, or else moved by river to Northern ports, where American-registered vessels transported the cotton to Europe. Most foreign vessels which happened to be on the scene at the start of the war sailed from Southern ports before the blockade was established, leaving behind a collection of merchant ships which were ill-suited to run through an enemy blockade. Initially, the Confederate merchant marine was made up of river boats, sailing ships, small coastal steamers, and just ten ocean-going steam ships. All of these large steamers would eventually be taken over by the Confederate Navy, and none of them attempted to run the blockade before their conversion into warships began. This meant that the only indigenous steam-powered merchantmen to operate out of Southern ports during the first year of the war were the small coasting packets which plied between ports in the Gulf of Mexico, or navigated the sheltered waters and inland waterways of the Atlantic seaboard. While these shallow-draft vessels were ideally suited for their purpose, they were incapable of undertaking transatlantic voyages.

The Southern states had come to rely on foreign steamships to supply them with the imports they needed. Following the imposition of the blockade, these foreign ships no longer served Southern ports. Only a handful of sailing ships arrived from, or sailed to, foreign ports during this period, and the strengthening of the blockade during the second half of 1861 made it almost impossible for large sailing ships to run through the cordon of Union steam-powered warships. It was clear that only ocean-going steamers could provide the Confederacy with the imports it needed to survive. The resources of the fledgling Confederate Navy were stretched to the limit, so initially the government was unable to build up a state-run merchant marine. It was up to private business to provide the wherewithal for the development of a merchant fleet capable of importing and exporting the goods which the Confederacy required.

**The wreck of the blockade runner *Ruby* on Morris Island, near Charleston, SC. She operated from 1862 on, but was finally driven ashore by the Union gunboat *USS Proteus* on February 27, 1865. (Clyde Hensley Collection, Fernandina, FL)**







Cotton was the main export of the Confederacy, and mill-owners in Europe were willing to pay high prices for cotton brought out of Confederate ports by blockade runners. In this engraving a blockade runner has unloaded its cargo in Nassau, and the cotton is being stored before being shipped on to Britain by a neutral vessel. (Stratford Archive, London)

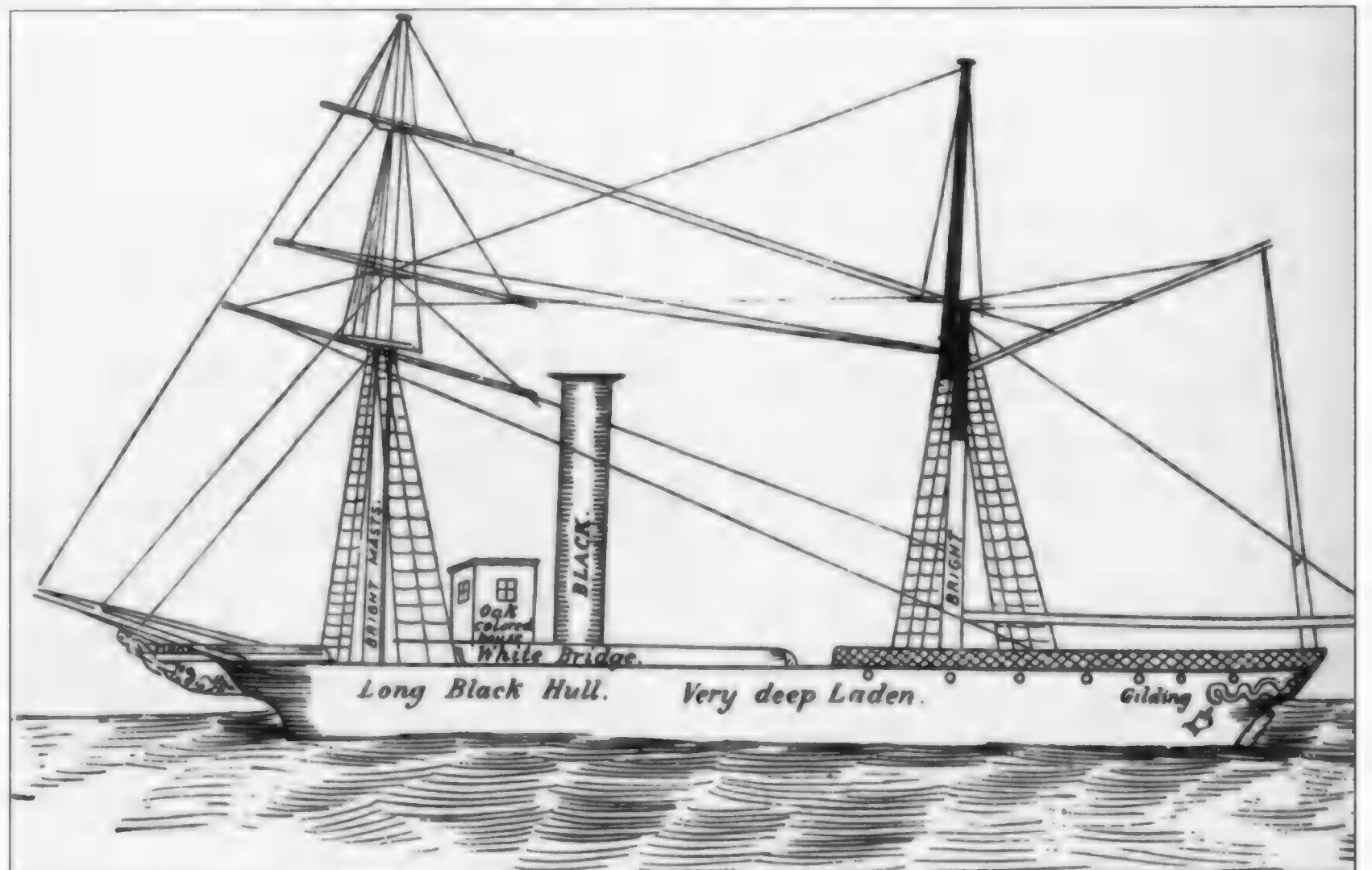
One of the most important shipping businesses in the South was the Charleston-based firm of John Fraser & Company, run by its senior director, George Alfred Trenholm. The subsidiary company of Fraser, Trenholm & Co. maintained an office in Liverpool, England, while another subsidiary was based in New York. The company operated five sailing ships which plied between these three ports, but the establishment of the blockade prevented these ships from sailing. Trenholm immediately approached the Confederate government, offering the services of his Liverpool subsidiary as a financial clearing-house. Specie deposited in Charleston could therefore be converted into letters of credit, which could then be exchanged for foreign currency by Confederate officials in Britain. This could then be used to purchase much-needed war materials. The arrangement was immediately approved by Major Josiah C. Gorgas, who ran the Confederate Ordnance Bureau, beginning a partnership that would last for the duration of the war.

Gorgas relied on his British-based assistants, Major Edward C. Anderson and Captain Caleb Huse, to purchase the weapons and supplies he needed, and to liaise with Charles Prioleau of Trenholm's Liverpool office to arrange their shipment to the Confederacy. During the summer of 1861 the Ordnance Bureau stockpiled a first batch of the necessary goods in Britain, while Prioleau looked for a suitable ship. He eventually chartered the 1,200-ton iron-hulled screw steamer *Bermuda*, commanded by Eugene L. Tessier. She left Liverpool on August 22, and slipped into Savannah 26 days later without encountering a single Union warship.

While the Ordnance Bureau shipped its own supplies on the *Bermuda*, the bulk of the cargo space belonged to Trenholm, or had been leased to other businessmen or agencies. Trenholm and others filled this space with war materials, which were duly sold to the Confederate government for a substantial profit. While the Ordnance Bureau shipped artillery pieces, Enfield rifles and cartridges, Trenholm and his associates imported shoes, blankets, cloth for uniforms, weapons, dry food stuffs, and pharmaceuticals. A month after delivering these the *Bermuda* cleared the Savannah River and returned to Liverpool, laden with 2,000 bales of cotton.



A naval attaché working for the US consul in Britain forwarded a sketch of the Scottish-built blockade runner *Fingal* to Washington in October 1861, so she could be readily identified by officers in the blockading squadrons. The work of his spies provides us with a useful visual record of the appearance of an early blockade runner. (Stratford Archive, London)



The *Bermuda* paved the way for all further blockade-running enterprises, and acted as the template for future cooperative ventures between the Confederate government and private businessmen. This said, Gorgas and his colleagues were alarmed at the high cost of these privately shipped goods, but the lack of any alternative meant that for the moment the Ordnance Bureau had to pay whatever price the shipping agents demanded. Prioleau and Trenholm justified the higher profits by pointing out the higher risk taken in sending a vessel to run the blockade. If captured, the Confederate government would only lose its portion of the cargo, while the shippers would lose not only the cargo but also their vessel, and any future income that ship might produce.

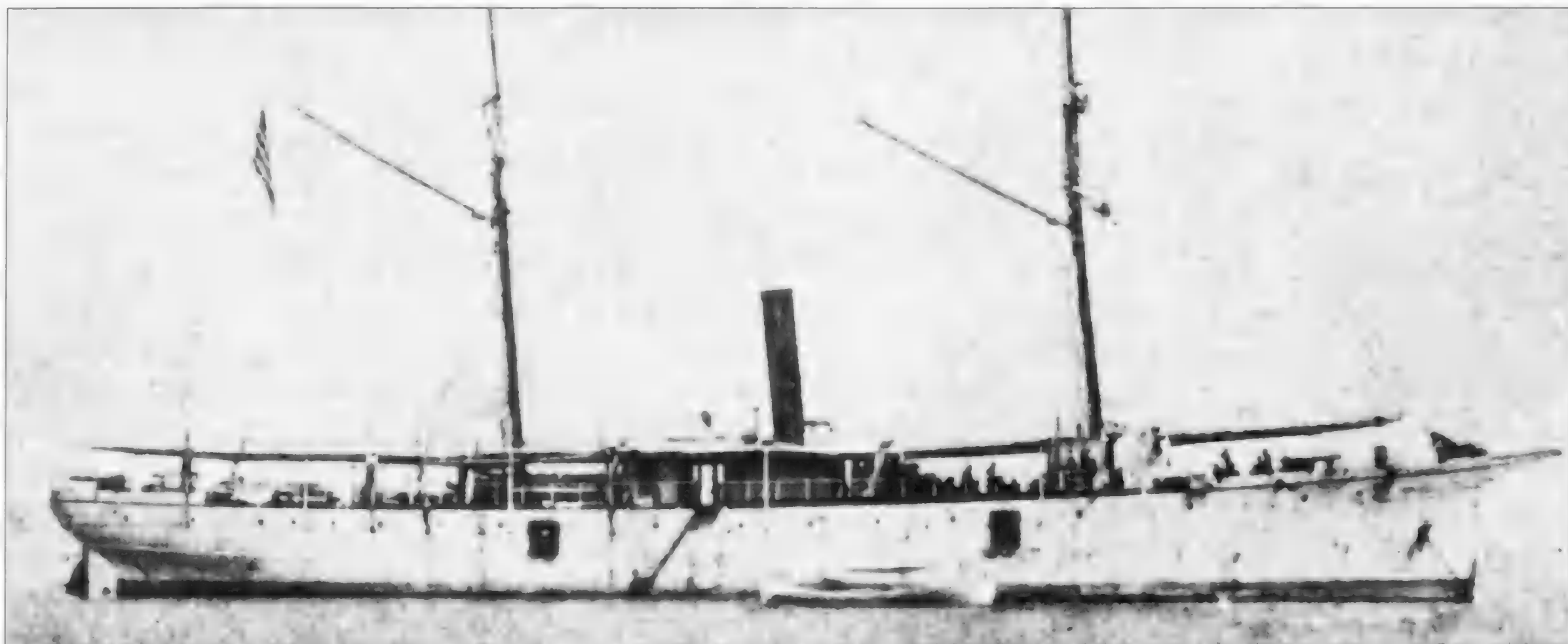
By the end of 1861 British shipping companies were eager to repeat the success of Prioleau and Trenholm, and several of these formed mutual associations to cover both the costs and the potential risks involved in setting up their own blockade-running enterprises. To avoid further extortionate charges, Major Anderson decided that the Ordnance Bureau needed its own vessel, and consequently purchased an iron-hulled screw steamer, *Fingal*. She sailed from Scotland in October 1861 and, after an eventful voyage, she slipped through the Union blockade into Savannah. She carried enough small arms to equip an entire division; 11,000 Enfield rifles, 500,000 cartridges and percussion caps, 730 swords, four heavy artillery pieces and over nine tons of other munitions. Unfortunately the *Fingal* was trapped in Savannah after the fall of Fort Pulaski, and she was eventually handed over to the Navy and converted into the ironclad CSS *Atlanta*. The *Fingal* was the only government-run blockade runner to see service for a year, as Confederate resources in Europe were considered better employed in the purchase of commerce raiders to attack Union trade rather than blockade runners. The import of war materials remained in the hands of private companies.

The biggest problem for the Confederacy was the supply of cotton. At the start of the war President Davis and his advisers decided to prohibit the shipment of cotton to Europe, as it was felt a shortage of the commodity would encourage the European powers to declare their support for the Confederate cause. This proved to be a mistake as, without a ready supply

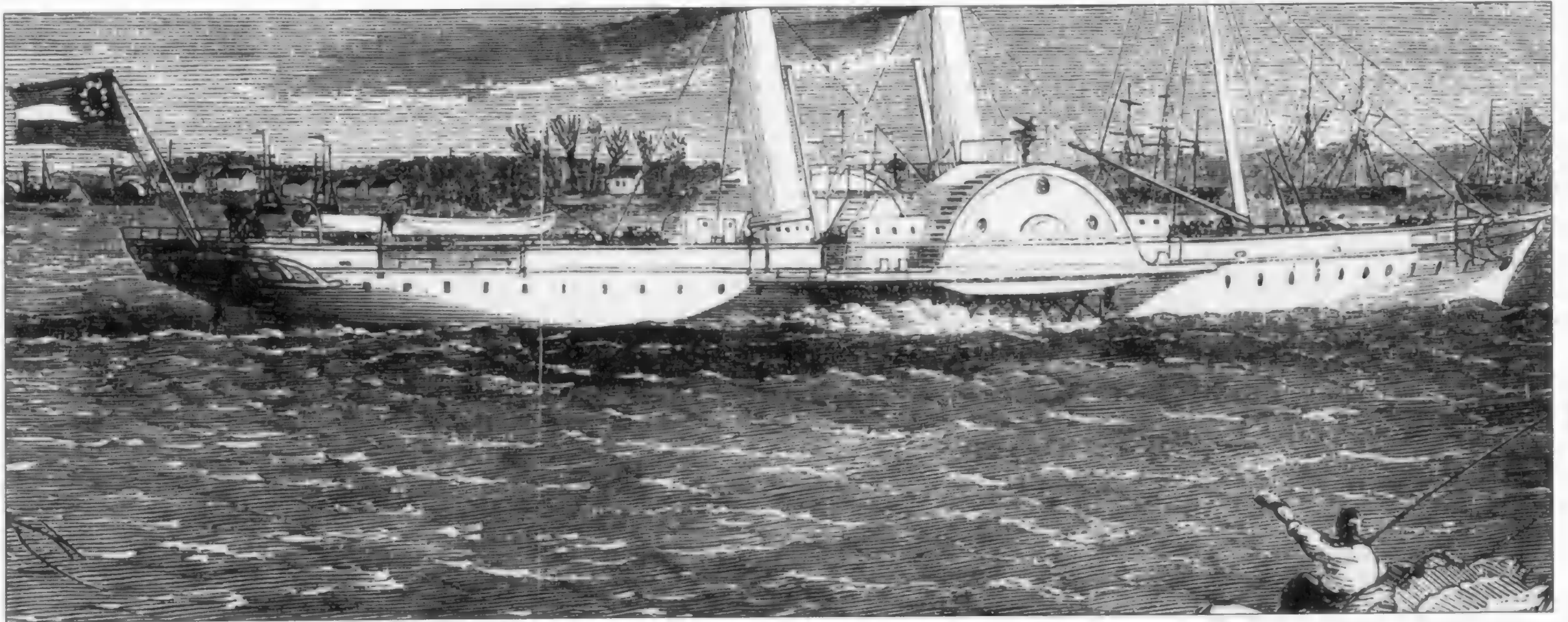
of cargo in Southern ports, many private companies were reluctant to enter the blockade-running business. During the first winter of the war, however, some trial voyages were attempted by small, fast sidewheel steamers, running between the southern Atlantic seaboard and the ports of Nassau in the Bahamas or Havana in Cuba. While these small vessels lacked the cargo capacity of larger transatlantic steamers, they found it easier to slip in and out of the blockaded ports, and were able to make use of small ports which were left unguarded by the blockaders. This prompted the Confederacy to send consuls and agents to Nassau and Havana in early 1862, laying the foundation for the full-scale use of these ports the following year. British shipping agents began to transport cargoes of weapons and munitions to these neutral ports, where both Confederate agents and other businessmen or ship owners purchased the war materials, transferring the cargoes onto their own vessels. Even though the war was not yet a year old, the blockade-running business was changing.

By the spring of 1862, smaller Atlantic ports such as Beaufort, Jacksonville and St Augustine had been captured, while the approaches to Savannah were blocked following the Union capture of Fort Pulaski. Shipping companies, such as John Fraser & Co. and its British subsidiary, gradually began to use Nassau as a halfway house. Trenholm gathered a group of five fast sidewheel steamers, and used them to ferry cargo between the Bahamas and the Confederacy. A local agent (Jean Laffitte) was appointed, warehouse space was rented and soon Trenholm's five blockade runners were supplied using larger transatlantic steamers, which transported goods from Liverpool to Nassau. The port was 500 nautical miles from Savannah, 515 from Charleston and 570 from Wilmington: a three-day voyage in a fast sidewheel steamer. Equally important, the average steamer would consume less than 180 tons of coal during the voyage, which meant that more space was available for a cargo than if the ship had sailed directly from a European port to a Southern one. Eventually, professional agents appeared, the largest of which was Henry Adderley & Co., which allowed smaller shipping companies to rival the representation of the larger shipping magnates like Trenholm. By the summer of 1862, while the number of attempted runs through the blockade remained low, blockade running was becoming a highly

**The wooden screw steamer *Florida* was built in New York in 1859, and was converted into a blockade runner in 1861, most probably in New Orleans. She was captured off the coast of Florida in April 1862, then commissioned into the US Navy as the USS *Henrick Hudson*. (US Naval Historical Center, Washington, DC)**







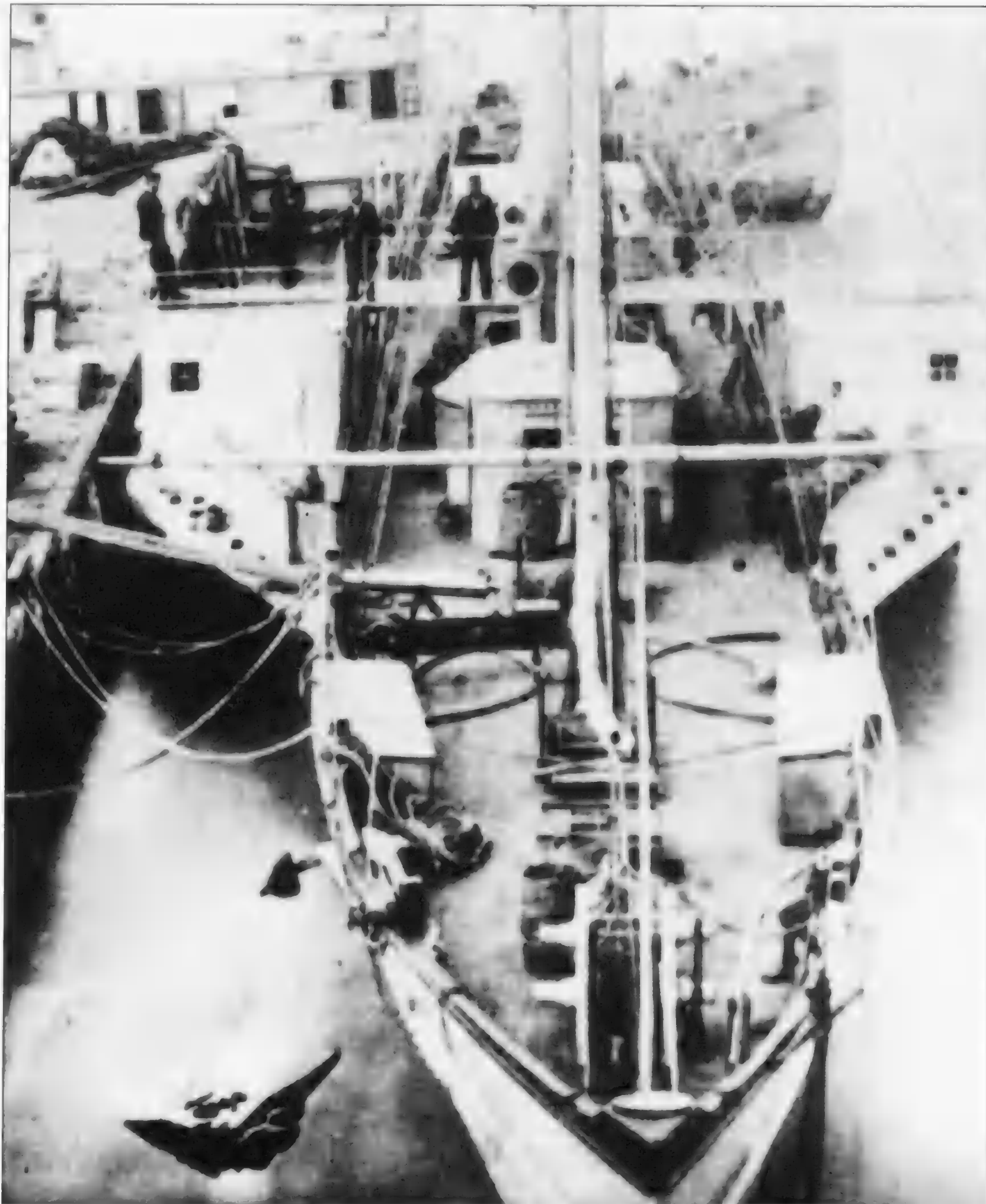
**The port of Nassau in the Bahamas was a haven for blockade runners throughout the war. In this engraving a Confederate blockade runner enters the port laden with cotton after successfully slipping through the blockade. (Stratford Archive, London)**

organized business, and the infrastructure was being laid for it to develop into a major enterprise.

The growing scale of these operations is revealed in a study of the arrival of blockade runners in Confederate ports. During 1861 one blockade runner entered Wilmington from Nassau, and no vessels sortied out of the port. As for Charleston, one vessel arrived from Nassau, and four sailed. Only the *Bermuda* and the *Fingal* entered Savannah and, of these, only the *Bermuda* sailed out again. The only other vessels to run the blockade were three which slipped out of New Orleans, and one to enter Galveston.

During 1862 six blockade runners entered Wilmington, and six sailed; 27 arrived in Charleston during the same year, almost all sailing from Nassau; 30 vessels cleared Charleston, and all but six of these were bound for Nassau (of the remainder, one sailed to Liverpool, two to Bermuda and three to Havana). Of these, the most successful vessels were the *Kate*, the *Cecile* and the *Herald*, all of which were owned by Trenholm. Only the *Kate* slipped through the blockade into Savannah during this period, while three arrived in the smaller port of New Smyrna. The sidewheeler *Thomas L. Wragg* (formerly the cruiser *Nashville*) also slipped through the blockade, but only after running into the Ogeechee River to evade capture. She was later converted into a privateer. During the same year, only six blockade runners sailed from Georgia: three from Savannah (two of which were captured), and three from New Smyrna.

In the Gulf of Mexico, the blockade runners *Cuba* and *Havana* each made two trips in and out of the Florida port of St Marks during 1862, the latter vessel being destroyed during her outward run in June 1862. Further to the west, only the *Cuba* and two other blockade runners entered Mobile from Havana during the year, and of these, only the *Cuba* and the *Alice* (later renamed the *Matagorda*) successfully escaped through the Union blockade again to reach Havana. The loss of New Orleans in April 1862 was a huge blow to the Confederacy, and all but ended blockade-running efforts from Louisiana, although a group of six small blockade runners evaded capture by escaping from other small ports, bound for Havana. Three blockade runners departed from Sabine City and Galveston in Texas during 1862, while five evaded pursuit to reach Texas ports from Havana.



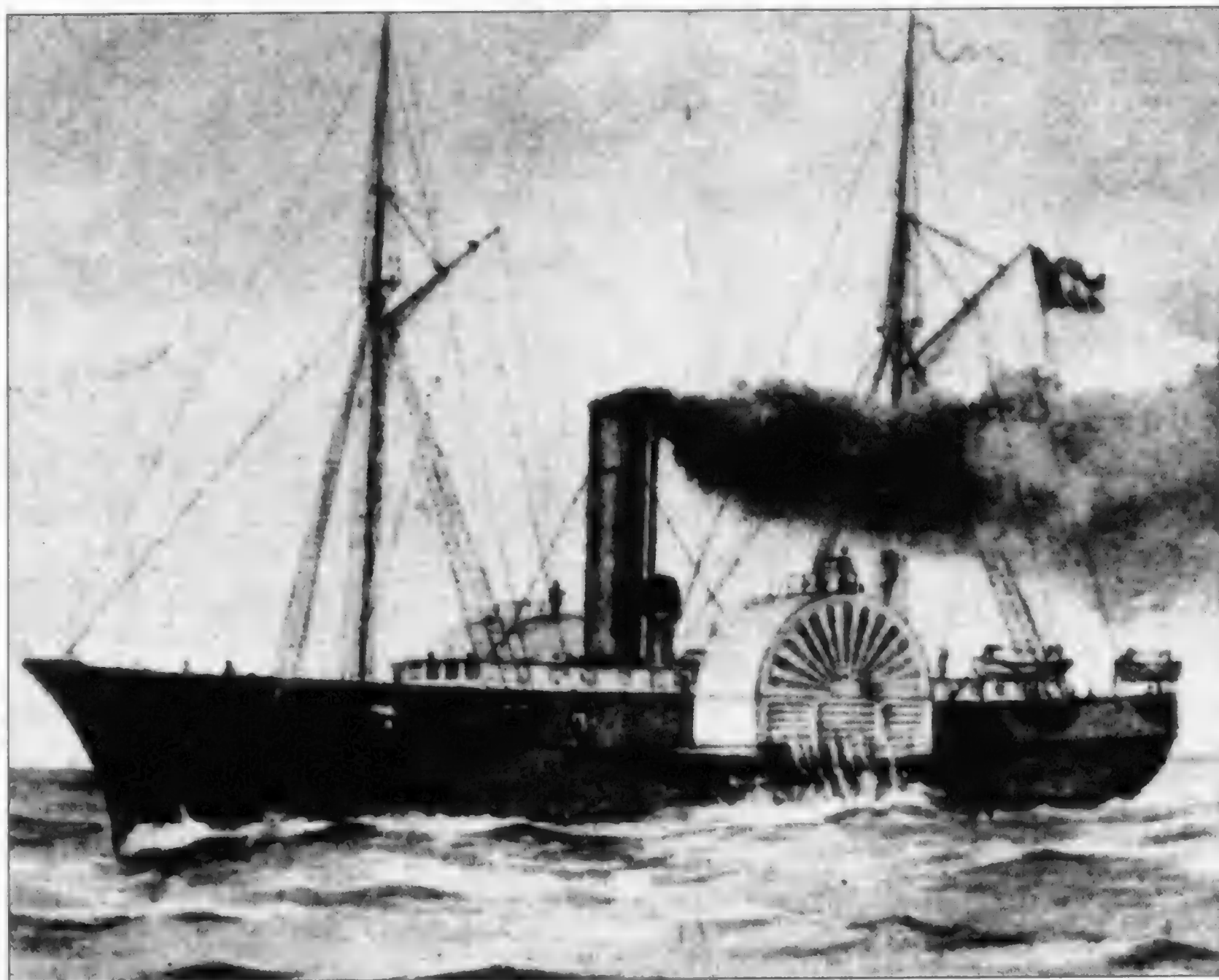
Built at Glasgow in Scotland, the small blockade runner *Neptune* made several voyages between Havana and the Confederacy before being captured off Mobile Bay by the USS *Lackawanna* in July 1863. Renamed the USS *Clyde*, she was attached to the Eastern Gulf Blockading Squadron. (US Naval Historical Center, Washington, DC)

From all this it is clear that, while the number of vessels willing to run the blockade was gradually increasing, the numbers remained low. At the same time the combination of a strengthened blockade and the capture of parts of the Confederate coastline by Union troops was reducing the number of available ports. Charleston remained the most important blockade-running base, but as the year progressed the Union blockade was strengthened, making it harder to slip out of the South Carolinian port.

While these early blockade runners were learning their business, other purpose-built vessels were being built or converted on both sides of the Atlantic. Early ships like the *Bermuda*, the *Thomas L. Wragg* and the *Cecile* were discovered to be poorly suited to the business, either through being too large to operate in confined coastal waters, too small to carry enough cargo, or too slow. Experience had shown that the best blockade runners were vessels like the 477-ton wooden-hulled sidewheel steamer *Kate*, a New York-built ship which was impounded, then purchased by John Fraser & Co. She made 20 successful voyages before she was wrecked after hitting an underwater obstacle in the mouth of the Cape Fear River. With a hull length of 165ft and a beam of under 30ft, she



The Confederate commerce raider CSS *Nashville* was decommissioned in 1862, and was purchased for use as a blockade runner. Renamed the *Thomas L. Wragg* in March 1862, she proved less than successful as a blockade runner, and was converted into a privateer in November 1862, becoming the *Rattlesnake*. Three months later she was destroyed on the Ogeechee River, SC, by the monitor USS *Montauk*. (Stratford Archive, London)

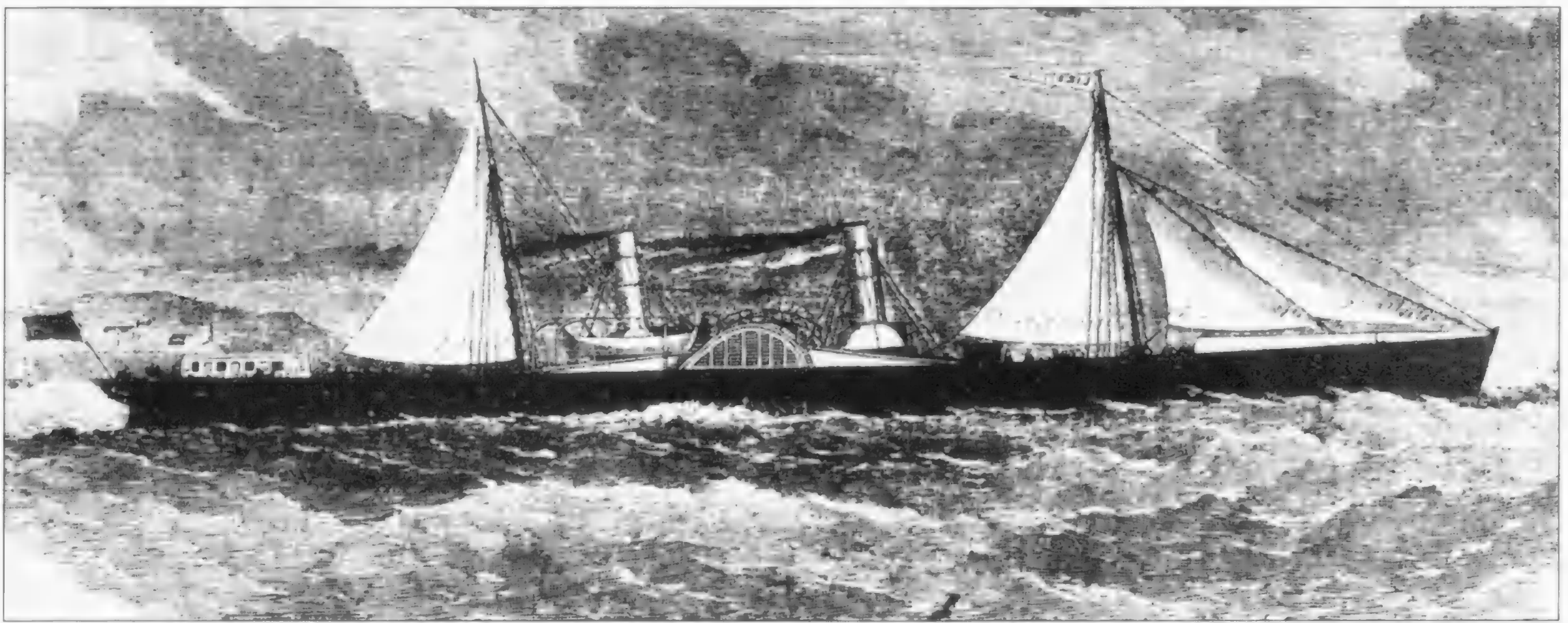


was sleek, fast and capable of carrying a substantial cargo. By 1863, a new breed of specialist blockade runners were ready to test themselves against the Union fleet.

### **Specialized blockade runners**

By the start of 1863, the Confederate economy was in crisis. A string of Union military successes, and the reluctance of the European powers to recognize the Confederate States of America, had undermined the government's long-held belief in the economic power of cotton. Preventing its free export only seemed to hinder the flow of imports into Southern ports, and withholding it increasingly denied Confederate agents in Europe the financial wherewithal they needed to supply the Army with guns. By the summer of 1862, the Confederate Navy had already begun to use common bonds to purchase vessels in Europe. In March 1863, this practice was expanded to encompass a common bond scheme, while a foreign loan negotiated with a French banking house provided the Confederates with another source of much-needed cash. This inspired the Ordnance Bureau to renew its efforts to control weapons shipments. Major Gorgas established a forward base of operations in St George, Bermuda, then purchased three steamers; the *Columbia* (renamed *Cornubia*, but nicknamed "Lady Davis"), *Eugenie* and *Merrimac*. These shallow-draft side-wheel steamers would run between Bermuda and Wilmington, importing Ordnance Bureau supplies and exporting government-owned cotton. They proved to be mechanically unreliable, but the *Cornubia* made 18 successful round trips before being captured off Wilmington in November 1863, while the *Eugenie* made ten return voyages before being retired from service. The success of these vessels encouraged the Ordnance Bureau to continue its efforts.

The steel-hulled screw steamer *Phantom* was purchased from Fraser, Trenholm & Co. in early 1863, but she only made four successful round



trips before being run aground and destroyed off the North Carolina coast in September 1863. A far more successful government-owned blockade runner was the British-built sidewheel steamer *Giraffe*, which was soon renamed the *Robert E. Lee*. This fast steam packet was built on the River Clyde and had operated between Glasgow and Belfast before her purchase by the Confederate government. She made her first run in late December 1862 and, despite running aground, she managed to slip into Wilmington. After being renamed, she was handed over to the Ordnance Bureau, and in January 1863 she ran the blockade to join the other government-run blockade runners in Bermuda. During her career the *Robert E. Lee* made 14 successful round trips before her capture by the USS *James Adger* off Beaufort, North Carolina the following November.

During 1863, government agents in Britain also purchased the steam vessels *Hebe*, *Dee*, *Ceres*, and *Vesta*. These were sister ships, whose twin screws gave them a speed in excess of 13 knots. Not only were these iron-hulled vessels fast, but their reversible screws made them extremely maneuverable. Their only real drawback was that they all had a deep draft, a factor which ultimately made them unsatisfactory blockade runners. The *Ceres* and *Vesta* were intercepted and driven ashore on their first voyage, while the *Hebe* and *Dee* were more successful, although both were also driven ashore and destroyed within a year of entering service.

The Ordnance Bureau was not the only Confederate department which ran its own blockade runners. The Confederate Navy experimented with running its own vessels during 1863, but none proved successful. The state of North Carolina decided to operate its own state-run blockade-running enterprise, based in Wilmington. Governor Zebulon B. Vance authorized the purchase of the iron-hulled sidewheel steamer *Lord Clyde*, and in June 1863 it successfully ran into the Cape Fear River from Bermuda. Renamed the *Advance* (sometimes mistakenly referred to as the *A.D. Vance*), the North Carolinian vessel proved highly successful, making 17 round trips before being captured coming out of Wilmington in September 1864. Like many captured blockade runners, she was pressed into Union service as a blockading vessel.

By this stage of the war it was becoming clear which type of vessels made the best blockade runners. After the first few months of the conflict, sailing ships were no longer considered suitable as they were too

**The British-built blockade runner *Lizzie*, as pictured in the *Illustrated London News*, 1862. She displays all the hallmarks of a typical blockade runner: powerful engines, stream-lined hull, low freeboard and retractable smokestacks. (Stratford Archive, London)**



easy to spot and too slow to evade pursuit. And analysis of shipping returns shows that after the summer of 1862 only 40 sailing vessels attempted to run the blockade off Charleston for the remainder of the war, and almost all of these were small schooners and sloops.

Only steam-powered vessels had a real chance to escape if they encountered a blockading warship. At the beginning of the war, almost any type of steamer could be used, and the chances of success were high, as the blockade was still largely ineffective. By the latter part of 1862 it was becoming clear that large, deep-drafted vessels were at a disadvantage, as their draft limited the course they could steer through the sandbars, shoals, and shallow waters encountered off all Southern ports. Instead they were forced to stick to deep-water channels, which were almost all patrolled by Union warships. Clearly steam-powered vessels with a shallow draft were better suited, whether these were powered by paddlewheel or screw. Most blockade runners were sidewheel steamers, however, as they usually required less water to operate in than similar-sized screw-powered vessels.

After some experimentation, it was discovered that the best and most readily available type of sidewheel steamer were the vessels known as "Clyde steamers," named after their place of construction, the River Clyde in Scotland. During the 1860s these vessels were characterized by having long, iron-built hulls, narrow beams, powerful sidewheel engines, and a shallow draft. They were widely used as passenger steamers (or "packets") around the British Isles and as cross-Channel ferries. They were also known for their sleek, graceful lines and the strength of their construction. These packets were further renowned for their internal elegance, though this was a factor which was of no importance to the ship owners who purchased these craft as potential blockade runners. What they wanted were fast, sleek hulls, not graceful passenger carriers.

The first Clyde steamer to be used as a blockade runner was the *Herald*, a Dublin to Glasgow packet purchased by Fraser, Trenholm & Co. in mid-1862. Within a year, the Clyde shipyards were filled with similar vessels which were undertaking conversion from packets into blockade runners. The conversion process was simple. First, any state rooms were

**The port of St George in Bermuda was a bustling place during the Civil War, as blockade runners offloaded their cargoes of cotton, and neutral British steamers brought much-needed war materials and other goods to the port, for trans-shipment to the Confederacy on board blockade runners. (Stratford Archive, London)**





removed to increase cargo capacity. The height of masts and spars was reduced to lower the silhouette of the ship, although in some cases the masts were hinged so that they could be lowered, or split in two sections so they could be removed completely when desired. On some vessels, the smokestacks (funnels) were telescoped, usually in two or three sections, so that the height of these could be reduced. Finally, the hulls were repainted to make them less visible.

From late 1863 onwards the shipyards on the Clyde in or near Glasgow and on the Mersey in or near Liverpool also began to produce vessels which were designed from the keel up as blockade runners. The prototype of these new vessels was the *Banshee*, a steel-hulled sidewheel vessel built by Jones, Quiggin & Company in Liverpool during 1863. The vessel was 214ft long, with a beam of only 20ft, and a capacity of 533 tons burden (325 gross tons). Many new blockade runners were at the forefront of steamship development, employing new methods of construction, the latest propulsion systems, and radically new hull designs. The *Banshee* was no exception, being the first steel-hulled vessel to cross the Atlantic. Her hull was an experimental one, and she was badly battered by storms during her voyage to the Bahamas, forcing her to undergo repairs and improvements. Her hull was strengthened, and the result was a vessel that was ideally suited to its purpose. The *Banshee* made 14 successful round trips through the blockade on behalf of the Anglo-Confederate Trading Company, rewarding her owners with immense profits. She was eventually captured by the USS *James Adger* in November 1863 while attempting to enter Wilmington.

During the latter part of 1863 some 100 vessels were actively engaged in blockade running at any one time, but most vessels made no more than

**The iron-hulled blockade runner *Lady Sterling* was built in London in early 1864, but was captured off Wilmington in late October 1864. Pressed into service as a Union gunboat, she survived the war to become the Cuban filibuster *Hornet*. (US Naval Historical Center, Washington, DC)**



one or two trips through the blockade in the course of the year, as captains waited for ideal conditions, or else agents waited for a cargo. By contrast a handful of vessels made regular trips, assisted by a combination of the luck and skill of their captains and the superb design of the vessels themselves. One such vessel was the *Ella & Annie* (originally the *William G. Hewes*). She made several successful runs both for her private owners (the Importing & Exporting Company of South Carolina) and on behalf of the Confederate government, who chartered her to run supplies to and from Texas in the summer of 1863. She was damaged during a storm in the Florida Straits in November 1863, and was subsequently captured by the USS *Niphon*. Typical of this latest generation of specially converted blockade runner, the *Ella & Annie* was an iron-hulled sidewheeler, with a cargo capacity of 1,477 tons burden, but with a draft of just ten feet.

By late 1863 the first purpose-built blockade runners began to join the ranks, the majority being similar in appearance to the *Banshee* and the sleeker Clyde packets. As usual, the majority of these new vessels were built in Britain, and either operated by British companies, or run as Anglo-Confederate partnerships. A handful were Confederate government owned. These vessels tended to be steel- or iron-hulled, designed with a

Once the *Lord Clyde*, a packet steamer plying between Glasgow and Dublin, this Scottish-built 1,300-ton sidewheel steamer was renamed the *Advance* in 1863, and became a blockade runner. Captured by a Union gunboat in September 1864, she was commissioned into the US Navy as the gunboat *Advance*. (US Naval Historical Center, Washington, DC)





large cargo space, a low silhouette, and were stronger and faster than the majority of blockade runners in service. Stylistically they tended to combine the sleek, racing lines of the *Banshee* with the rugged seaworthiness of the Clyde steamers. This said, the two major shipyard areas producing purpose-built vessels each developed its own style and, while the best Liverpool-built ships were renowned for their speed and graceful lines, the Scottish-built vessels from Glasgow's Clydeside were regarded as stronger and more mechanically dependable. London shipyards also provided their share of blockade runners, although almost all of these vessels were converted to the purpose rather than being specially built.

It is worth noting that of the 350 known blockade runners in operation during the war, the origins of over 300 of them have been identified. Of these, some 225 were built in Britain, while another 80 were built in American ports, 60 in the North, 16 in the South and four in Canada. The majority of the Northern-built ones were either purchased by Southern companies before the war, or else they were impounded in Southern ports when the war began. This means that roughly three out of every four blockade runners were British-built. Among these, the division between Clyde-built, Thames-built and Mersey-built was roughly equal.

These vessels entered service at a critical time for the Confederacy. Heavy losses of manpower, resources and territory were making themselves felt, and the Confederacy was finding it difficult to replace its losses of equipment, or even to feed the remaining troops in the field. It was becoming increasingly imperative that the Confederate government take a more active role in the supply of its forces. In March 1864 legislation was passed which ensured that the government gained control over the export of all raw materials from the country, and for the first time controls were imposed on the operation of blockade runners. One of these new measures was the impressment of cargo space: up to 50 percent of cargo space could be commandeered for government use if required, in return for a set fee. Although the shipping magnates complained, the measure was necessary to the survival of the Confederacy, so most owners accepted the new arrangement.

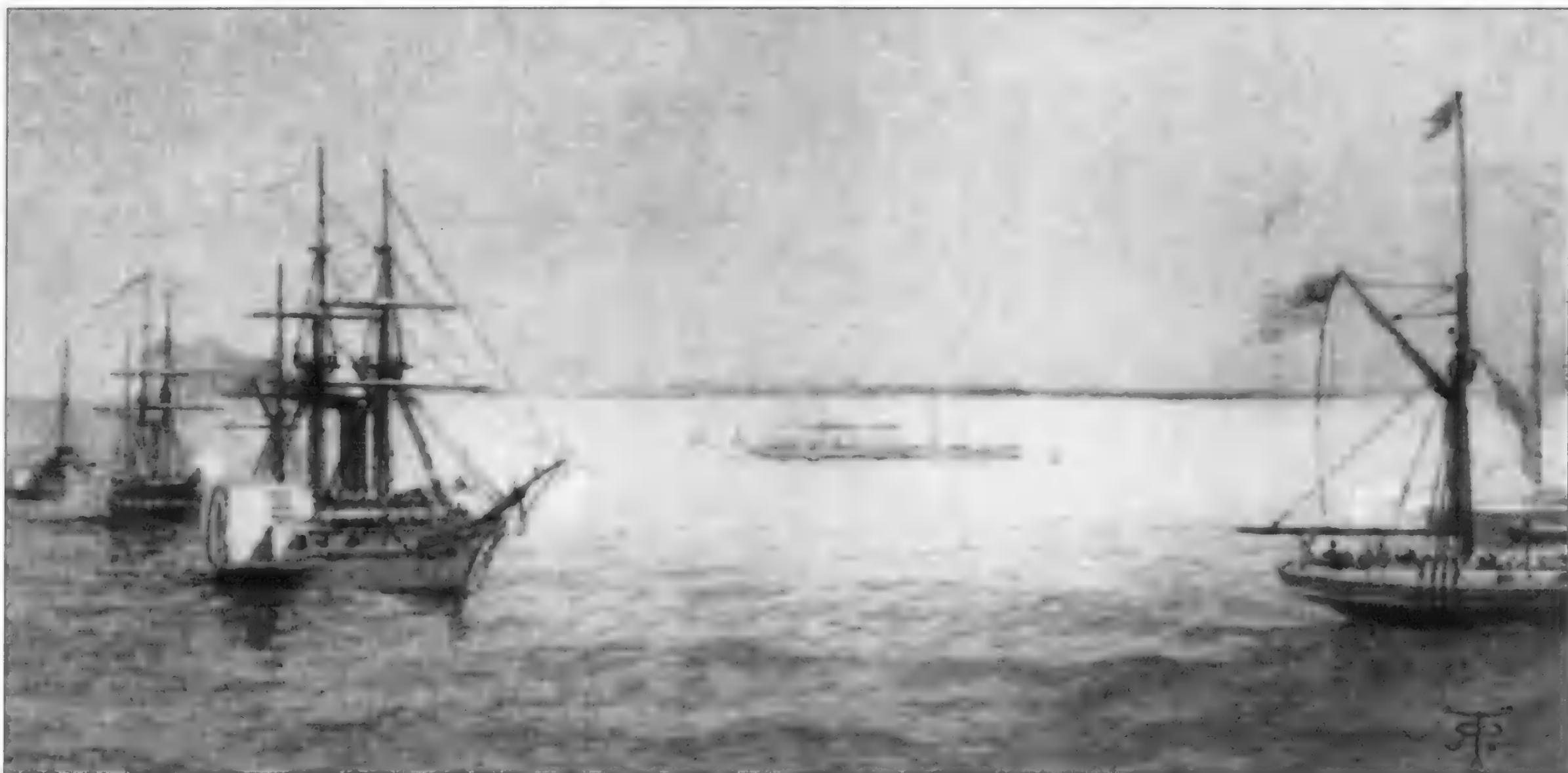
**The *Banshee* proved to be a highly successful blockade runner, making nine trips through the blockade off Wilmington. The 217-ton steel-hulled sidewheel steamer was purpose-built in Liverpool in 1863. The sketch depicts her being pursued by the Union gunboat USS *James Adger* off the Bahamas in 1864. (Stratford Archive, London)**



All of the Bermuda-based blockade runners operated by the Ordnance Bureau had been lost by the start of 1864, so the War Department decided to replace them with its own vessels. In April 1864, an agreement was struck between the department and Fraser, Trenholm & Co. It involved the supply of six sidewheel steamers; four built by Jones, Quiggin & Company (*Owl*, *Bat*, *Stag*, and *Deer*), and two by Laird and Sons (*Lark* and *Wren*; two others were ordered but never completed). The first four were identical vessels of 771 tons displacement, designed to carry 800 cotton bales apiece, while the smaller *Lark* and *Wren* (displacing 552 tons each) were designed for use in shallow harbors. Six other government-run blockade runners were ordered from British yards but were still on the stocks when the war ended. The six government-run vessels that were built in time to play a part in the war all entered service in late 1864.

Like many of the last blockade runners, these vessels were some of the fastest vessels afloat, and during the closing months of the war they did what they could to stave off defeat for the Confederacy. The events of late 1864 meant that this defeat was all but inevitable and, after the fall of Atlanta and Sherman's March to the Sea, the end of blockade-running was only a matter of time. While several companies edged away from the blockade-running business as they considered the risks were becoming too great, others continued to operate until the bitter end. For example, Trenholm began to diversify his operation, shifting his company resources to other enterprises. Blockade runners reached their peak numbers in 1864, but growing problems of inland transportation, the supply of coal and the reliability of crews meant that the organization, sale and distribution of the goods transported into the South by these vessels was becoming an increasing problem. It seemed as if only the most efficient companies, such as the Anglo-Confederate Trading Company, Collie & Co. or Fraser, Trenholm & Co. could remain in full-time operation. This meant that, for their vessels, the profits increased while other vessels languished in port. Like any business venture, success went

**The purpose-built blockade runner *Banshee II* was based in Wilmington, but also ventured further afield. This sketch portrays a spirited and successful daylight run through the blockading squadron off Galveston in 1865. (Stratford Archive, London)**



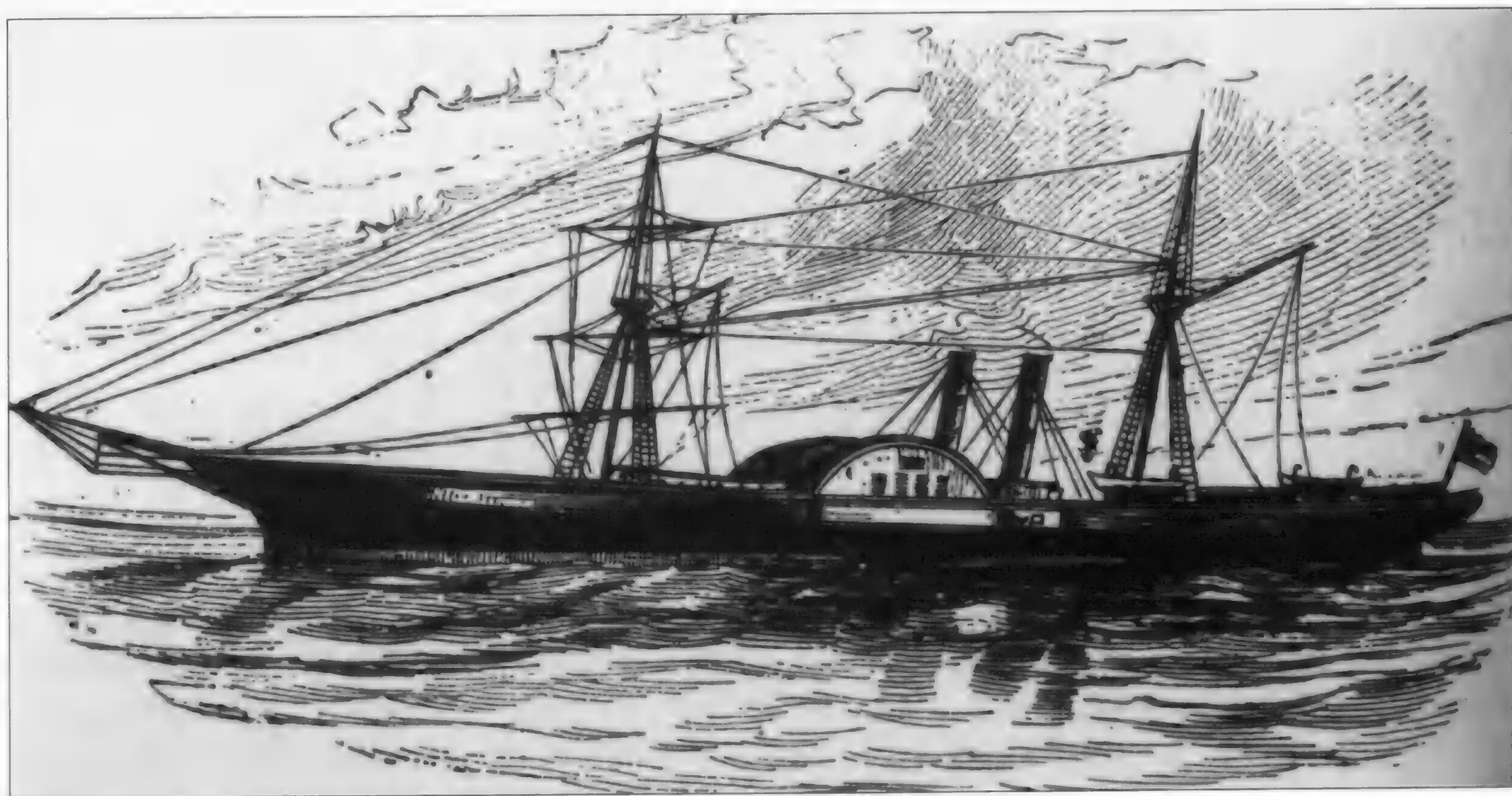
to those who were best organized, employed the best people and left the least amount to chance. In effect, a handful of blockade-running vessels such as the *Banshee* (II), the *Wild Rover*, the *Talisman*, the *Advance*, the *Colonel Lamb*, and a few others reaped the greatest rewards, and made the highest number of successful sorties. Almost all of these vessels were specialist blockade-running craft: the best of their breed.

Following the capture of Wilmington in February 1865, the remaining blockade runners which had eluded capture began to operate between Havana and Galveston. Successful though some of these voyages might have been, they did nothing to alter events in the East and, from February on, nothing reached the Confederate armies in the field from the coast. When Robert E. Lee surrendered his army at Appomattox, the era of the blockade runners had already passed into history. The few vessels which survived were adapted for regular use, and many continued to ply their trade in the years to come, either as merchant ships or, if captured, as US Navy warships. As late as 1884, the harbor master in Key West, Florida, wrote that an experienced eye could always detect a former blockade runner among other shipping in the harbor. Nothing else looked as fast, as sleek, and as graceful.

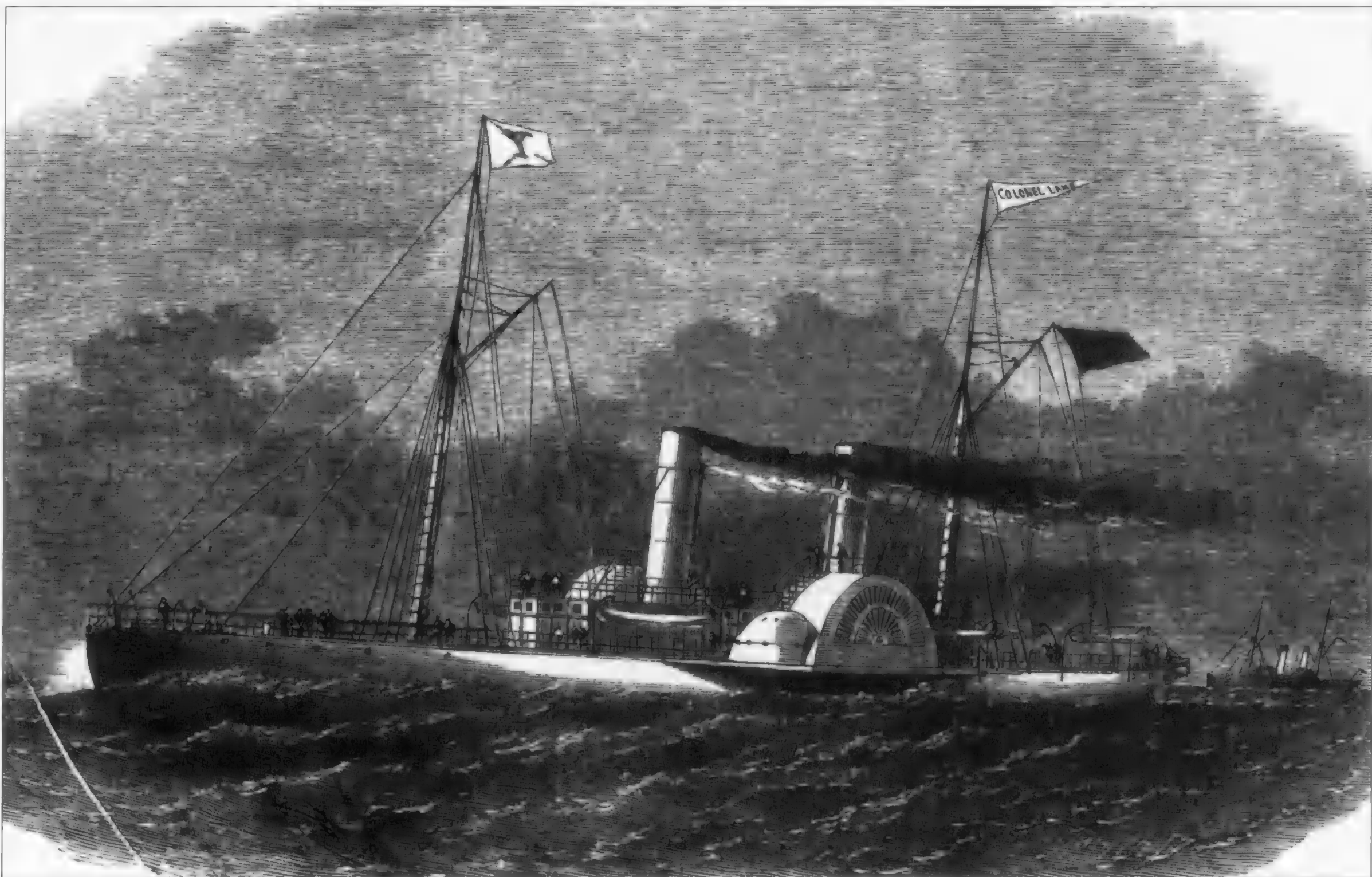
## DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

After a period of trial and error, ship owners were able to determine what kind of vessel made the best blockade runner. By the summer of 1863, it was rare for a blockade runner to attempt a transatlantic voyage. Instead, cargoes were shipped from Europe to friendly ports, predominantly Nassau, Bermuda, and Havana. From there, smaller blockade runners would make the fast run into Confederate ports. Initially, Clyde steamers and other fast sidewheel vessels were converted into blockade runners, but eventually orders for new, purpose-built ships were placed in British

**The Confederate-built blockade runner *Old Dominion*, off Bristol, in south-west England. While Liverpool continued to be the main port associated with blockade runners, other west-coast British ports were also used. (Stratford Archive, London)**







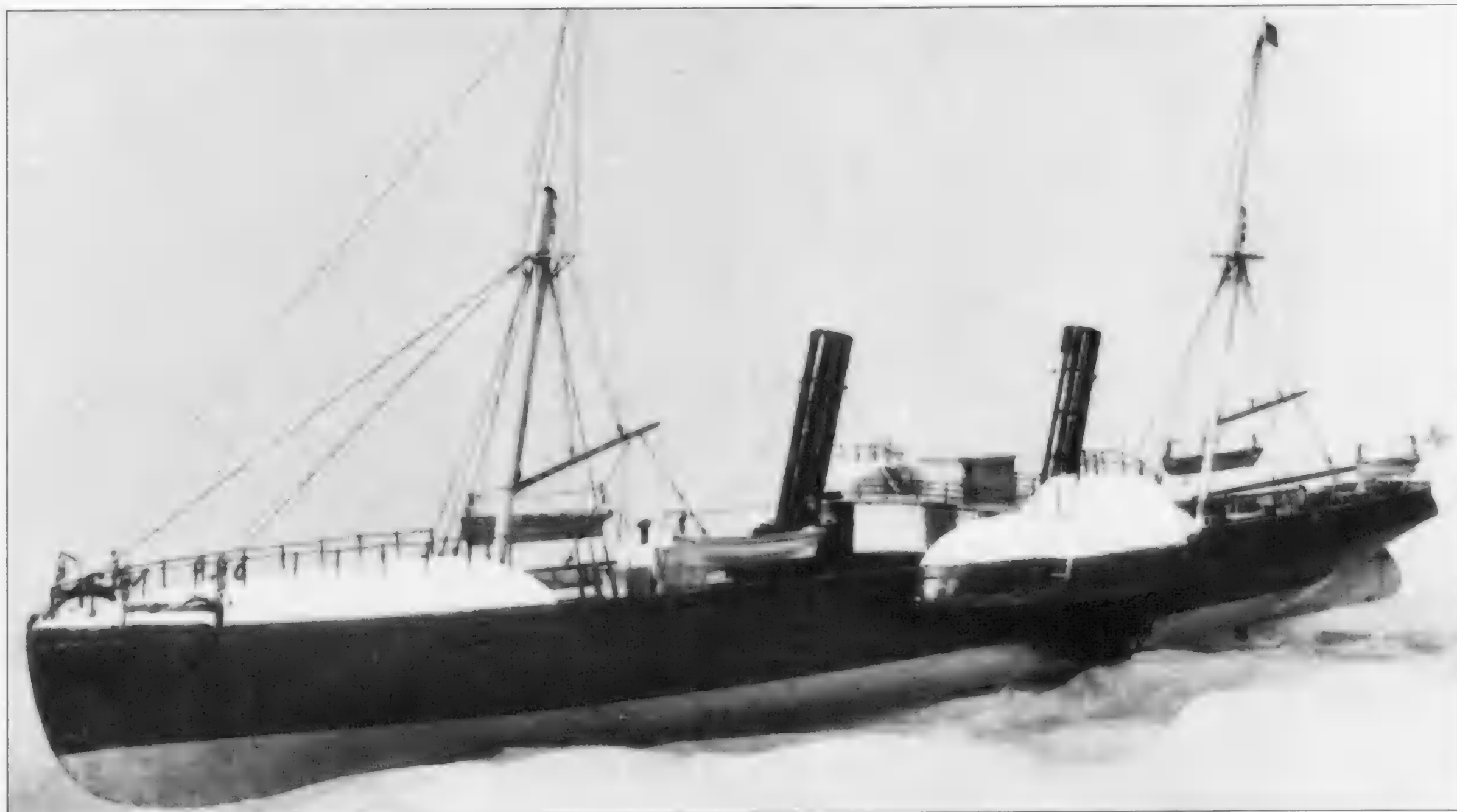
**One of two purpose-built blockade runners built in 1864 by a shipyard in Liverpool, the *Colonel Lamb* was the largest iron-hulled vessel of her kind when she was launched. She ran the Wilmington blockade only once, in late 1864, but escaped from the port before it fell, and she survived the war uncaptured. By contrast her sister ship *Hope* was caught by a Union gunboat off Wilmington in late October 1864. (Clyde Hensley Collection, Fernandina, FL)**

shipyards. This allowed the specific design characteristics of the ideal blockade runner to be incorporated into the construction of the vessel, resulting in what amounted to a completely new type of ship.

The typical blockade runner of the late war period was built in a British yard, had a shallow draft, extremely low freeboard, and almost no superstructure, as cabins and other deck houses made the ship more visible. Engines were also mounted as low as possible within the hull to keep the vessel's silhouette to a minimum.

The long hulls of these vessels were slender, but as much space as possible inside the vessels was turned over to cargo. The hull lines were graceful, with a streamlined shape, sweeping curves to the hull, a rounded stern to reduce wake, and a graceful bow, designed to keep the prow of the ship low in the water. The result was a vessel of great beauty. It was common for ship designers to use the same set of blueprints to produce several vessels with the same characteristics, creating what amounted to a class of ships. This made the construction simpler, as parts could be prefabricated, and it ensured that production times were reduced. By 1864, the Scottish yard of William Simons & Co. of Renfrew on Clydeside was producing blockade runners within four months, a feat which was encouraged by hefty production bonuses and other incentives for both the shipyard and its workers.

Other innovations were incorporated into the designs of purpose-built blockade runners. Scottish engineers conducted experiments with water resistance to different hull shapes, proving that long, narrow hulls were preferable to wider ones. While this was generally accepted before this period, these engineering tests produced the first hard scientific data which could be used by 19th-century ship designers. A vessel like

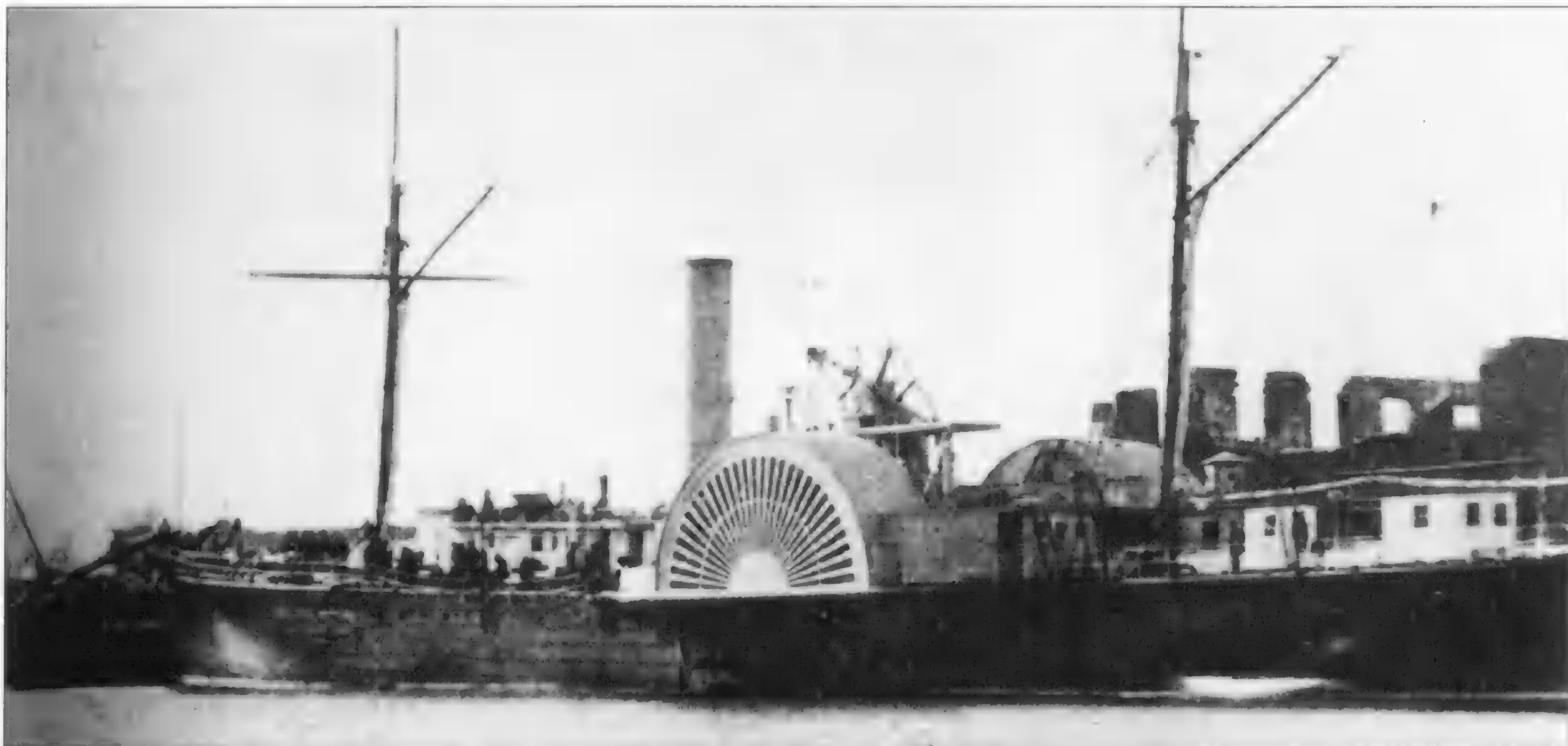


the *Banshee* (I) had a length to beam ratio of 10:1, compared with the usual merchant ship ratio of just 6:1. The typical Clyde steamer of the day had a ratio of around 8:1. The problem with extremely narrow hulls was that they increased the tendency of the ship to roll in heavy seas, making them poor seaboats. The narrow beam also reduced the cargo capacity of the vessel. Eventually an ideal ratio of 8:1 was decided upon, and this became the standard ratio for the blockade runners built during the last year of the war. To improve seakeeping qualities the bows of most blockade runners were designed to cut through the waves, rather than “porpoise” over them like other ships. This reduced the tendency to wallow, but made the decks very “wet” as water was continually breaking over the forecastles of these ships and running aft. The solution was to cover the forecastle with a convex metal cover, known as a “turtleback” due to its shape. Many later blockade runners incorporated this new feature, which is still found in modern deep-sea fishing boats, which have to cut through the waves in order to reduce the strain on any towed fishing nets. The ability to cut through the waves rather than porpoise had the added benefit of keeping the vessel low in the water, reducing her chances of being seen.

Given the pressure to produce fast ships, it was not surprising that designers took advantage of the latest shipbuilding technology. More than any other nation the British had realized that the future of maritime trade lay in steam-powered vessels, and in metal hulls. The use of metal for the framework and outer skin of seagoing vessels was a great leap forward in ship design. A ship built using iron frames required a much smaller supportive framework than a wooden ship of the same size, which made it significantly lighter. This in turn meant that the ship could achieve greater speeds through the water, given the same size of engine. Construction methods remained similar to the old ways, however. A series of frames was built up from a central keel, and then

**The blockade runner *Hope* was a sister ship of the *Colonel Lamb*, both vessels being built by Jones, Quiggin & Co. of Liverpool. After her capture by the gunboat USS *Eolus* in the mouth of the Cape Fear River (October 22, 1864) she was sold, becoming the merchant steamer *Savannah*. She was subsequently sold to the Spanish Navy. (Liverpool Maritime Museum, Merseyside)**





**Built in Wilmington, DE, as the *William G. Hewes*, this iron-hulled sidewheel steamer was impounded in New Orleans when the war began. Renamed the *Ella & Annie*, she became a blockade runner operating out of Havana until her capture off Beaufort, NC, on November 9, 1863, by the USS *Niphon*. (US Naval Historical Center, Washington, DC)**

connected by transverse beams in a structure to provide rigidity to the framework. Interior space was no longer taken up by massive wooden ribs and knees, which meant more room for cargo. In addition, the hull of metal ships was considerably thinner than wooden ones, which also helped to conserve space.

The first commercially viable metal-hulled ships appeared during the 1840s, and by the outbreak of the Civil War these vessels were becoming increasingly common. The challenges set by the design of blockade runners gave ship designers a chance to experiment further. A good example of the experimental nature of these vessels is the *Banshee*, which, as previously noted, became the first steel-hulled ship to cross the Atlantic. Although she eventually became a successful blockade runner and her lines were copied in later ships, her initial design was flawed. As constructed her deck and hull plates were only  $\frac{1}{8}$ -in. (3mm) thick, less than half the thickness of the usual iron plating used on other contemporary vessels. During her maiden transatlantic voyage it was discovered that these plates buckled in heavy seas, and she limped into the Bahamas with a crushed forecastle, buckled hull sides and an extremely nervous crew. This was a tough way to discover that steel plating could bend if it was tested to the limits! After strengthening her hull, she resumed her career, and became a highly regarded blockade runner.

Most of these new ships had iron frames and iron hulls, although increasingly some had iron frames and steel-plated hulls, or were of all-steel construction. Another common type of design encountered amongst converted blockade runners was a combination of a wooden hull clad with iron plates. Almost all blockade runners had some degree of watertight compartmentalization, which reduced the risk that the entire cargo would be damaged if the vessel was hit, and also increased the ability of the vessel to absorb punishment, or counter any flooding.

Below decks, while all blockade runners needed to have powerful engines, these were mounted as low as possible in the hull to reduce the profile of the ship. New mechanical innovations which increased the power-to-weight ratio of engines, or resulted in smaller equipment

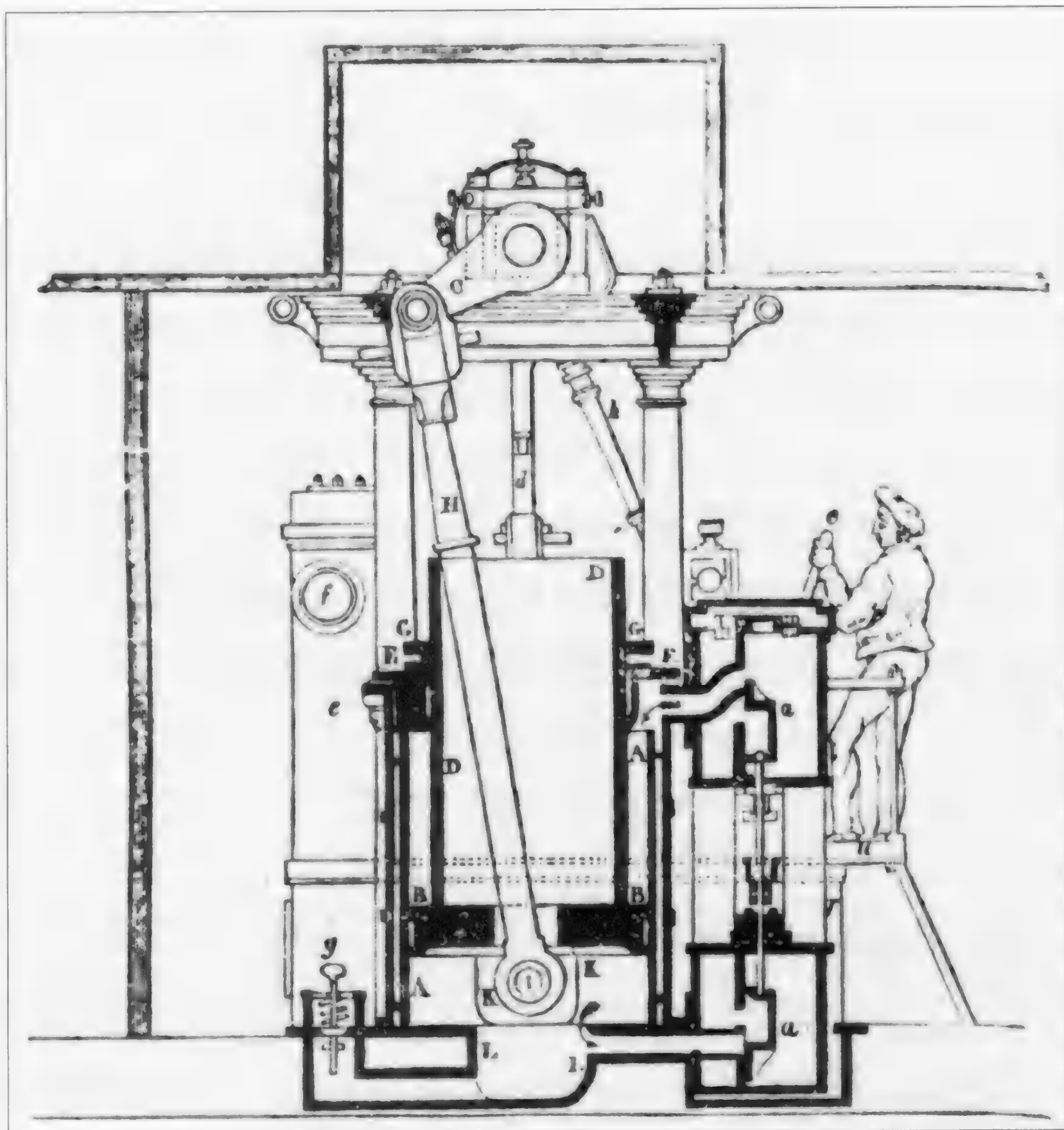
spaces, were readily adopted, as on blockade runners cargo space equaled money. To reduce the profile of the ship further, masts were shortened to the bare minimum, or were designed to be lowered, or even removed completely. Although this type of ship was officially called an “auxiliary steamer” as sails could assist the engines when required, sail power was rarely used, and was usually reserved for cases of mechanical failure. Other innovations included the raking of both masts and funnels to reduce their height, the “telescoping” of funnels so they could be lowered, and the reduction of the superstructure to the barest essentials, usually just a pilot house and a wheelhouse located amidships or toward the stern. The combination of all these design and construction factors resulted in the production of some of the most elegant ship types of the age of steam, and some of the fastest and most graceful vessels afloat.

## Propulsion

Steam propulsion was still in its infancy during the Civil War. Steam-powered riverboats appeared during the 1820s, and during the 1850s ocean-going steamers had become relatively common. This said, sail and wind remained the principal form of propulsion for merchant ships throughout the period, and steam was reserved for vessels which carried high-value cargoes, passenger ships and coastal or riverine craft.

The designs of engines varied considerably during this period, but in American waters the most popular type was the “beam engine,” where a piston connected to one end of an overhead beam, while the other end was attached to a drive wheel which turned the paddle shaft and the sidewheel. While fine for rivers or coastal waters, it was less suitable for the open sea, as the beam engine tended to stick up above the open deck, which meant that in rough weather water could crash into the engine room. A better design was the “side-lever” engine, which evolved from James Watt’s original engine. Most ships had two side-lever engines; one per sidewheel. Such an engine consisted of one or two vertical double-acting cylinders which enclosed a piston. These were linked to a crossbar (or “cross-head”), which moved up and down with the pistons. Connecting rods ran from the crosshead down to one

**A development of the sidewheel engine was the trunk engine, which took up considerably less space than beam or side lever designs. This engine, designed by Humphreys, Tennant & Company of Britain, was small enough to fit beneath the sidewheel housing of a vessel, and was used in several British-built late-war blockade runners. (Mariners’ Museum, Newport News, VA)**



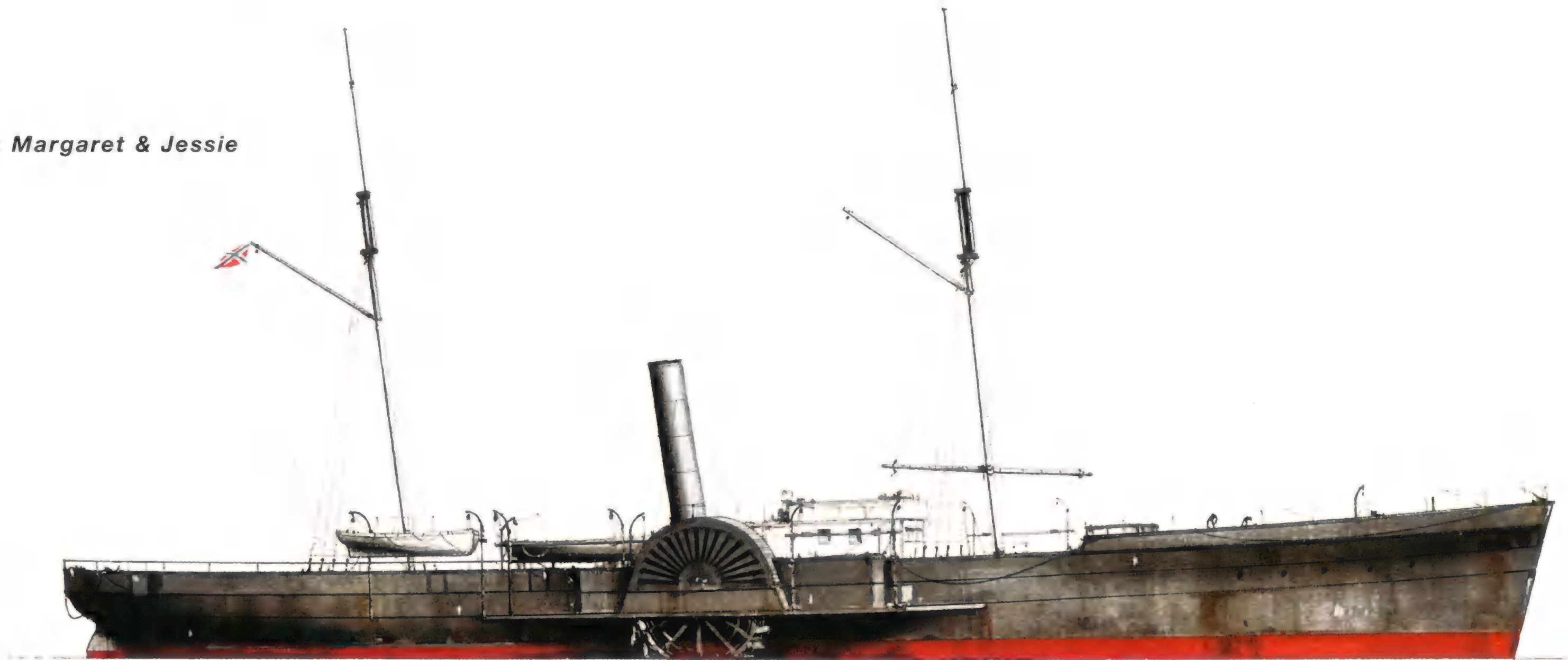


**A: Converted blockade runners**

**A1:** *Advance*



**A2:** *Margaret & Jessie*



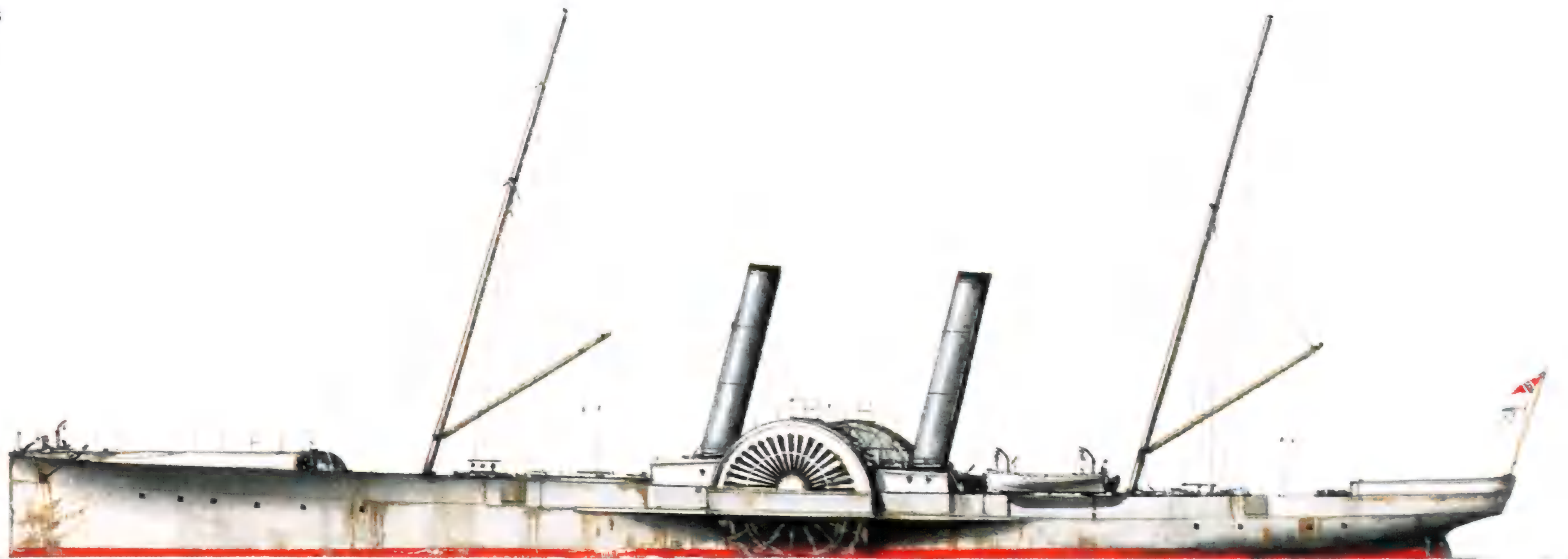




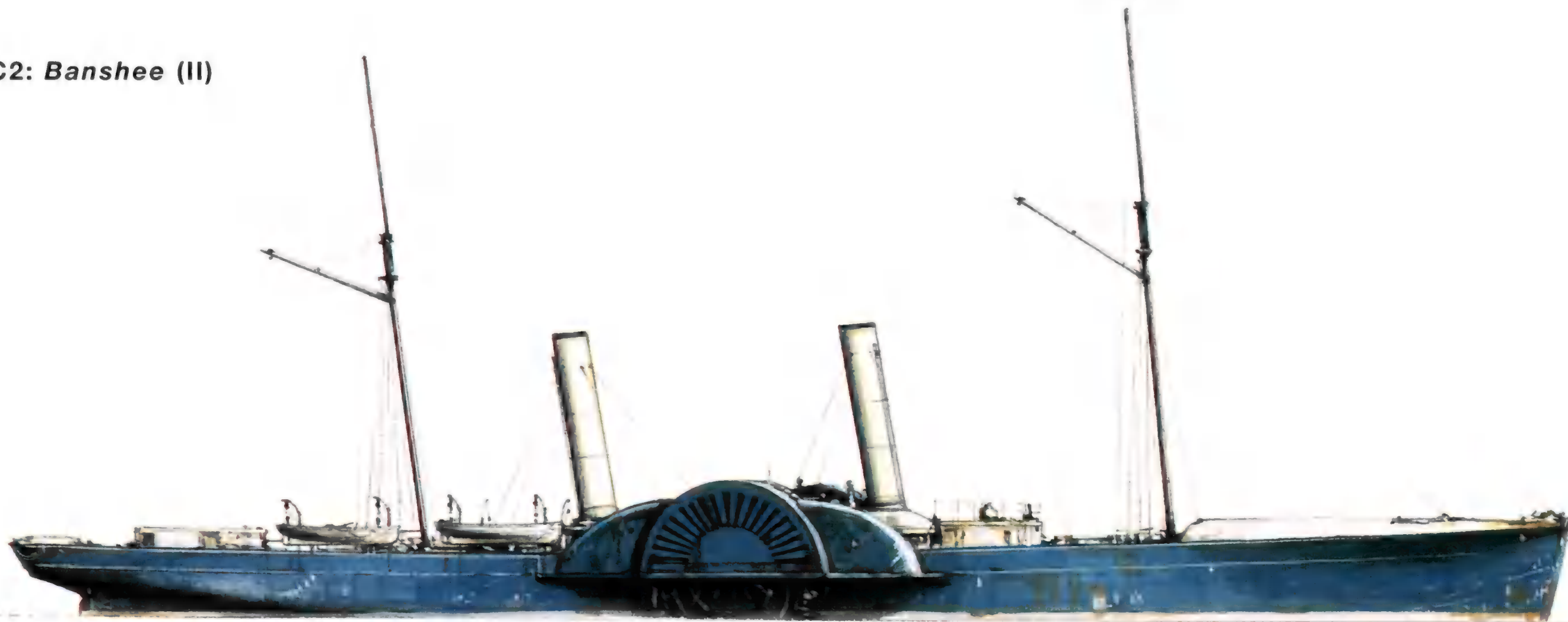
**B: Running the blockade off Wilmington, 1864**



**C: The Banshees**  
**C1: *Banshee* (I)**



**C2: *Banshee* (II)**





# D: COLONEL LAMB

## KEY

- 1 Bow, shaped to minimize her bow wave
- 2 Anchor
- 3 Cable locker
- 4 Boatswain's stores
- 5 Sail locker
- 6 Forward cargo hatch
- 7 North Carolina State Flag
- 8 Lookout cross-trees
- 9 Gaff-rigged spar (for propulsion under sail, and also used as a crane jib)
- 10 Foremast
- 11 Ship's cutter (one of two carried on board)
- 12 Main cargo hatch

- 21 Master's cabin and pilot's cabin
- 22 Company flag ("Colonel Lamb" on pennon)
- 23 British Red ensign
- 24 Gaff-rigged spar
- 25 Mainmast
- 26 After cargo hold
- 27 Dry provisions store
- 28 Water tanks (one of two)
- 29 Rudder
- 30 Coal bunker (one of two)
- 31 Paddlewheel

- 32 Paddlewheel box
- 33 Oscillating engine cylinder (one of two)
- 34 Steam trunking
- 35 Boiler (one of four)
- 36 Flying bridge (conning position while running the blockade)
- 37 Wheelhouse
- 38 Steel hull plating

## SPECIFICATION

**Displacement:** 1,132 tons (1,788 tons fully laden)

### Dimensions:

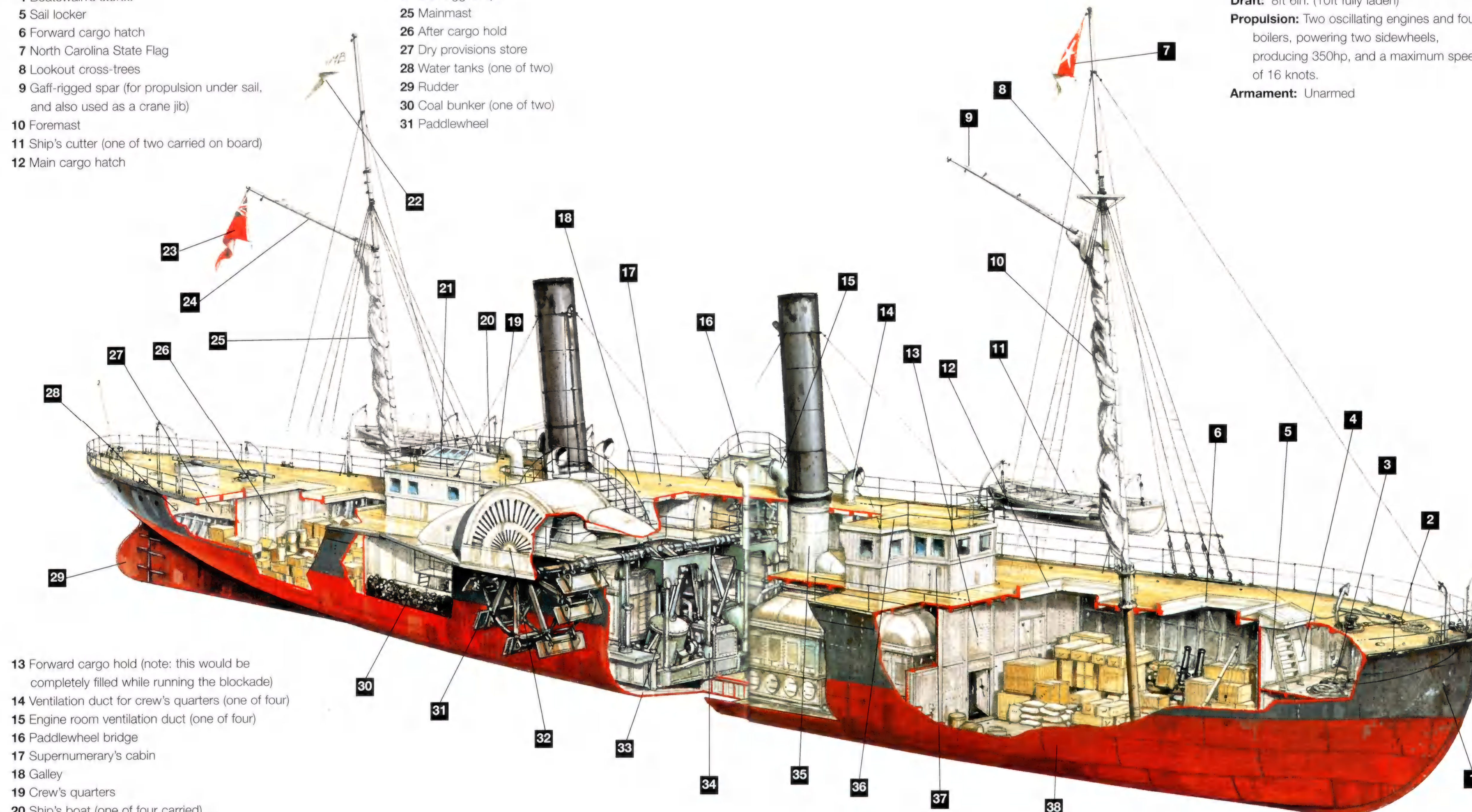
**Length:** 281ft 6in. (279ft 6in. between the perpendiculars)

**Beam:** 36ft

**Draft:** 8ft 6in. (10ft fully laden)

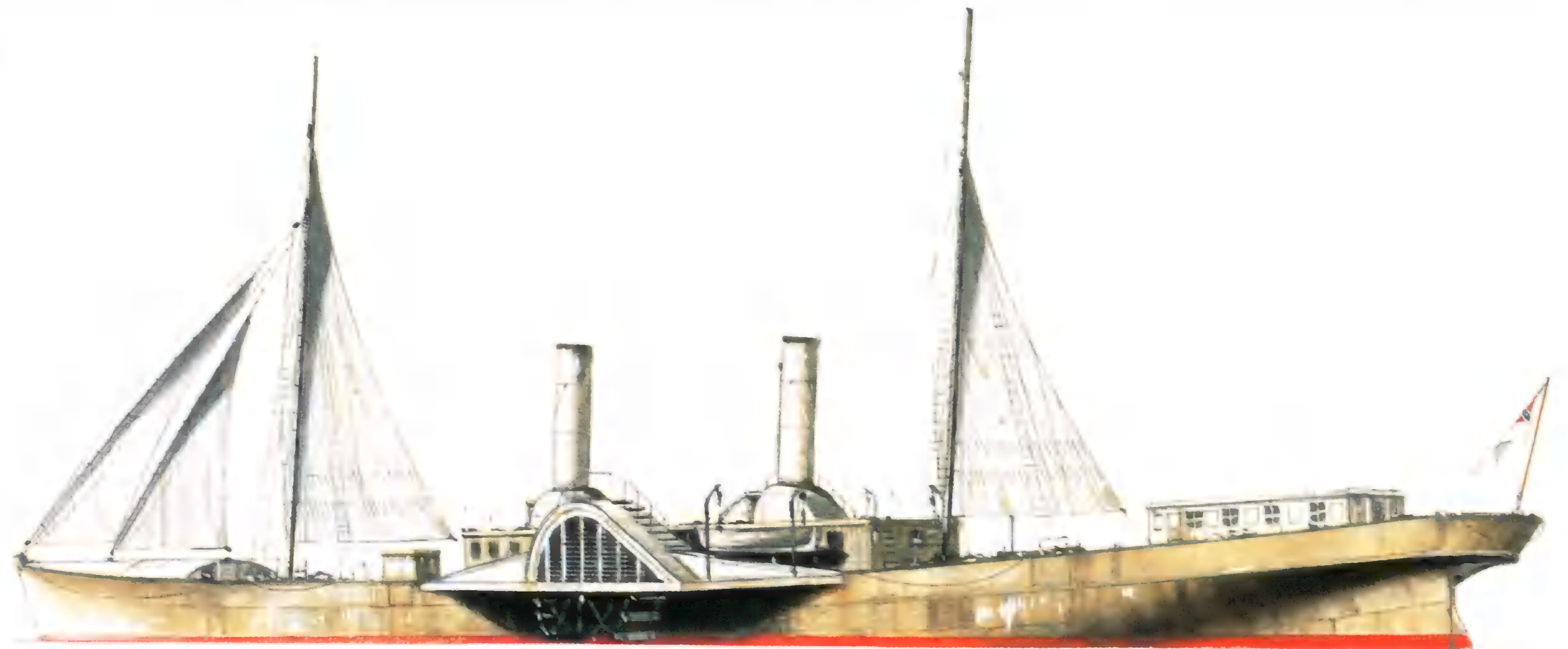
**Propulsion:** Two oscillating engines and four boilers, powering two sidewheels, producing 350hp, and a maximum speed of 16 knots.

**Armament:** Unarmed



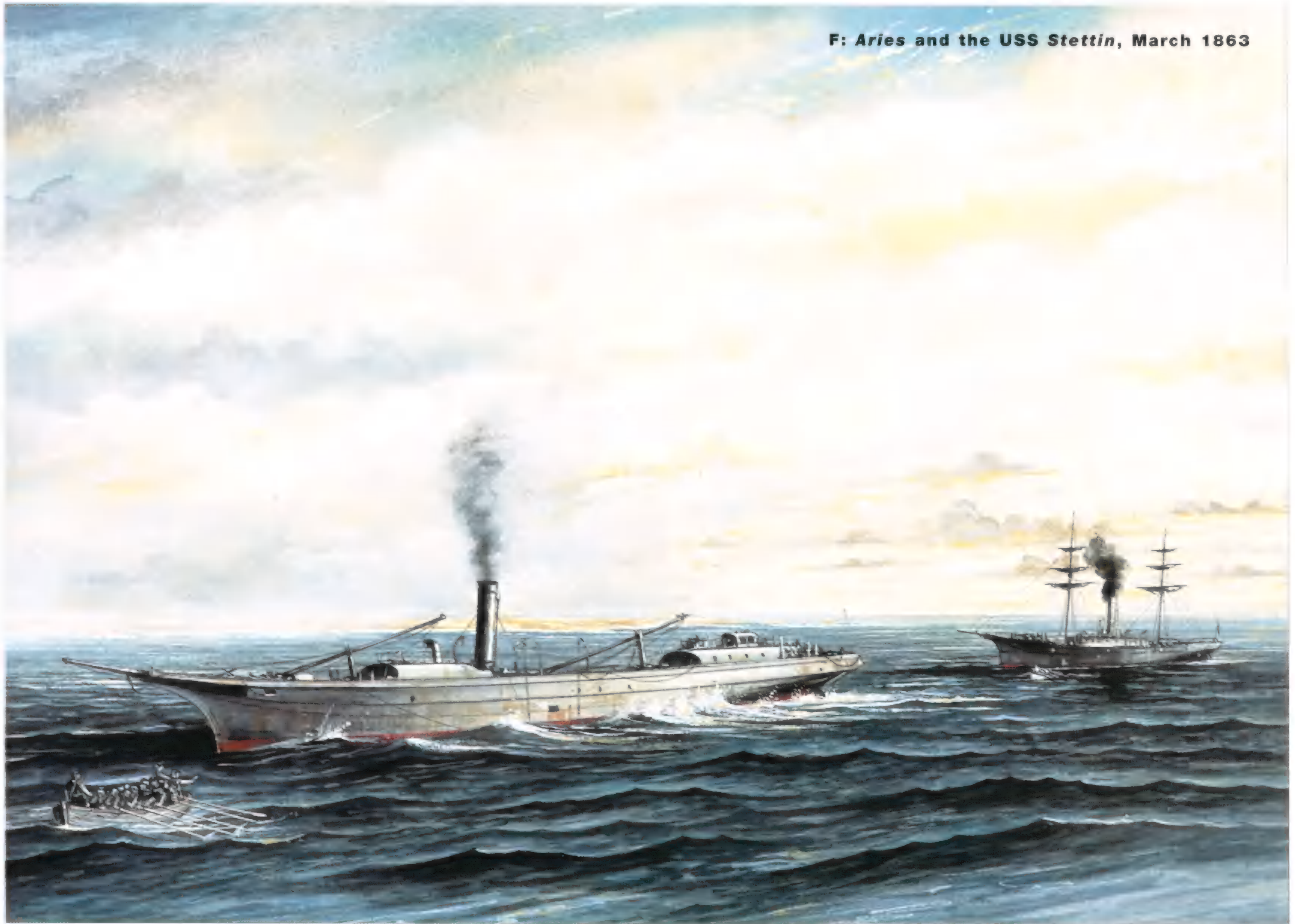
- 13 Forward cargo hold (note: this would be completely filled while running the blockade)
- 14 Ventilation duct for crew's quarters (one of four)
- 15 Engine room ventilation duct (one of four)
- 16 Paddlewheel bridge
- 17 Supernumerary's cabin
- 18 Galley
- 19 Crew's quarters
- 20 Ship's boat (one of four carried)



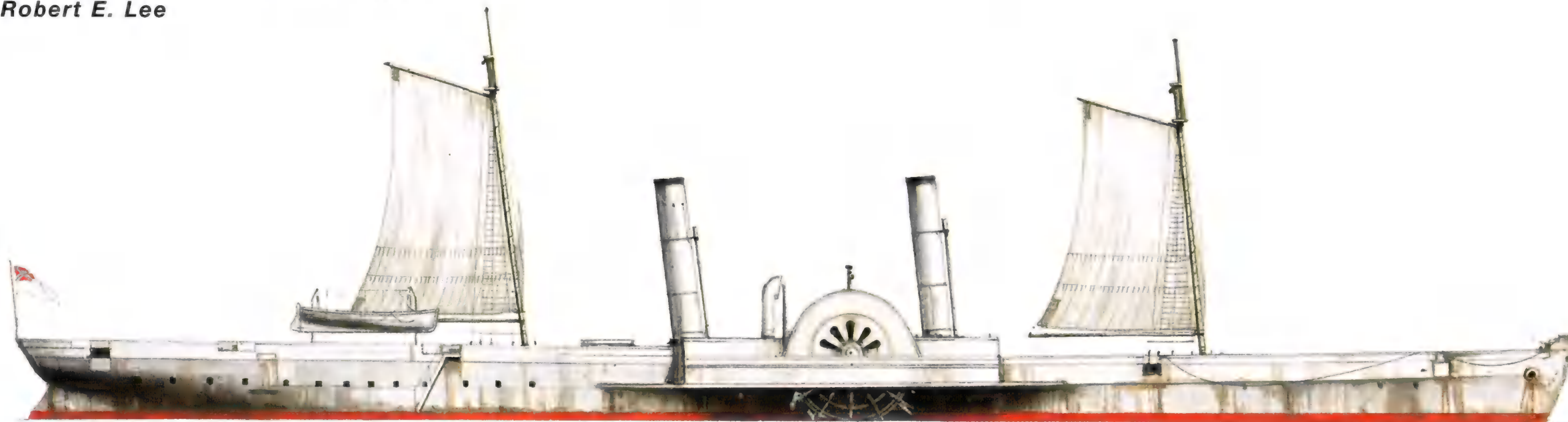
**E: Mid-war blockade runners****E1: *Lizzie* (II)****E2: *William G. Hewes***



**F: Aries and the USS Stettin, March 1863**

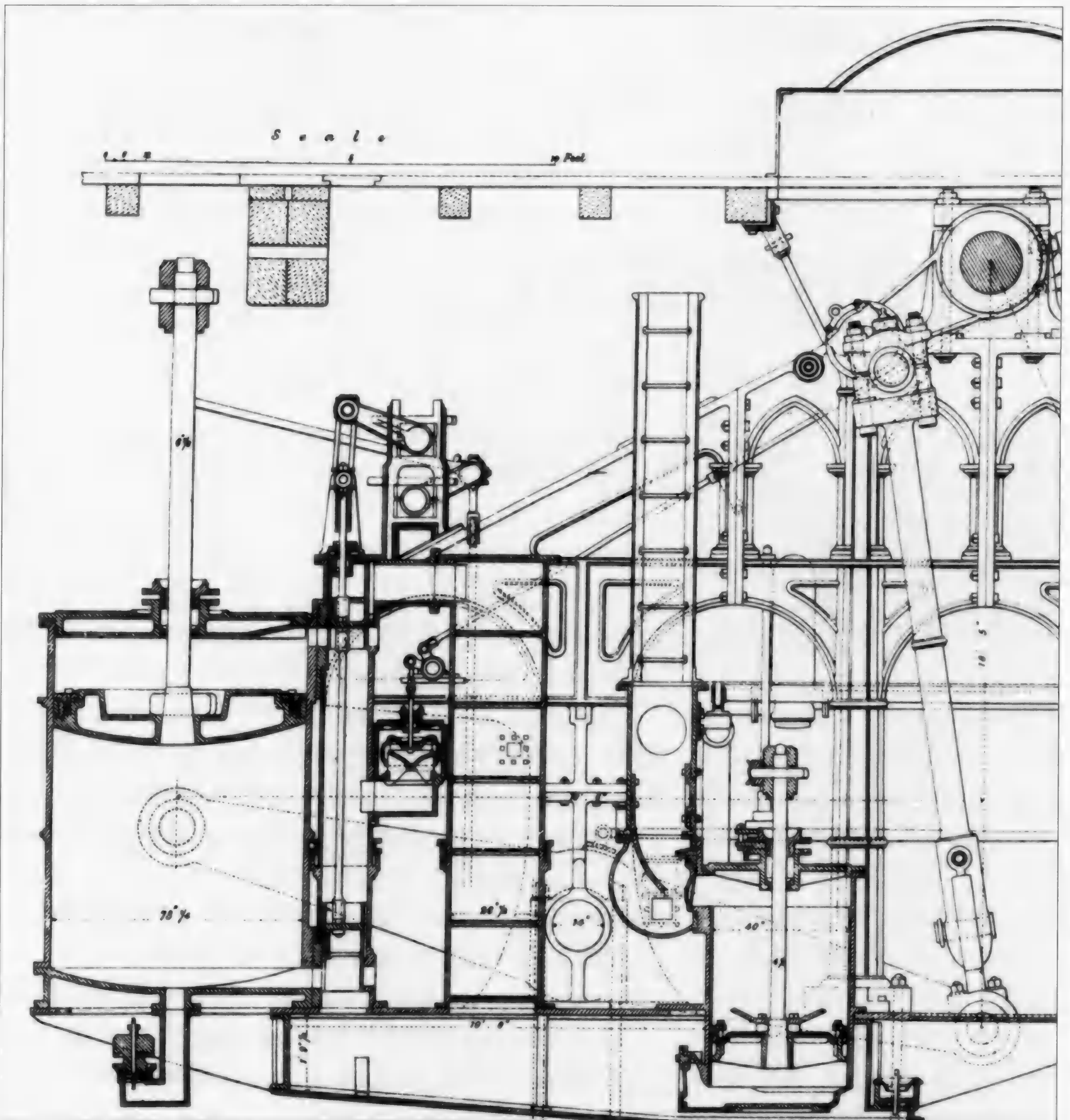




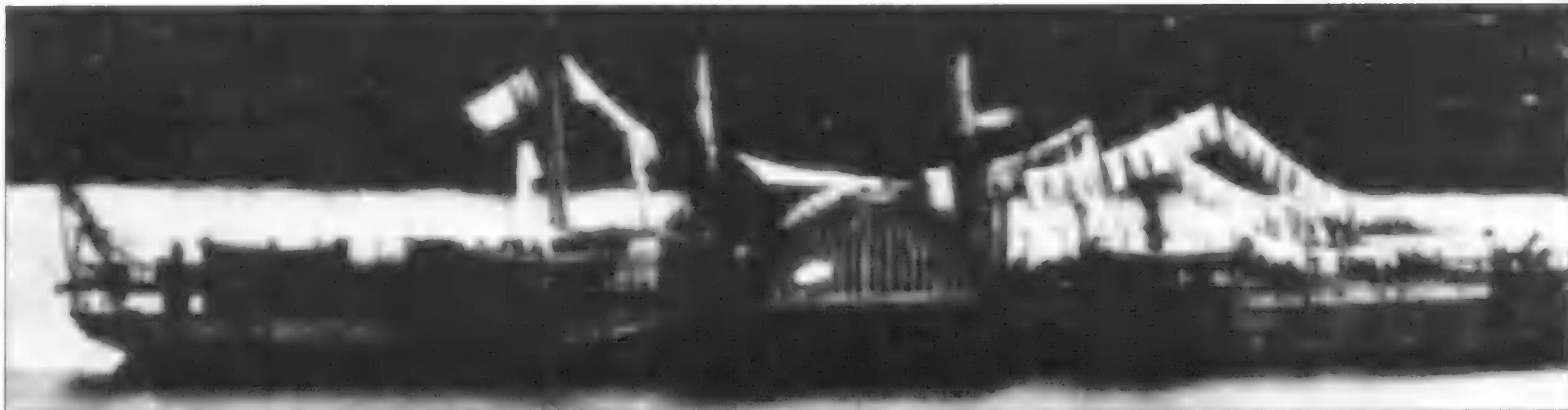
**G: Government-run blockade runners****G1: *Robert E. Lee*****G2: *Bat***

During the mid-19th century the general design of sidewheel engines improved, but they still took up a considerable space, which could otherwise be used to hold cargo. This longitudinal section of a side-lever engine is typical of the machinery installed in most blockade runners of the Civil War. (Mariners' Museum, Newport News, VA)

end of a large side-lever, an oval-shaped beam pinned at its center. Another connecting rod at the opposite end of the side-lever was attached to the paddle shaft. Each engine was a self-contained unit, and was usually fitted with "parallel motion mechanisms" to ensure the pistons rose vertically regardless of the ship rolling, and had its own steam system running from the boiler, complete with condensers and escape valves. During the decade before the Civil War, improvements were made to the condenser system, improving the reliability of the engines, and steam pressure was increased, allowing engines to operate at greater speeds. This design became the standard form of engine used in sidewheel-powered blockade runners during the Civil War.







The drawback of the side-lever engine was its weight and size. While this was relatively unimportant on the high seas, it became vital when blockade runners needed to outrun pursuers, or had to operate in shallow water when entering the smaller ports of the Confederate seaboard. An alternative design gained favor during the 1820s. The oscillating engine had no connecting-rod system, as the piston was attached directly to the paddle shaft by means of a crank lever. The piston pivoted (or oscillated) around its central axis due to the motion of the crank, but the motion caused steam leakage problems, so complicated mechanisms had to be devised the better to control steam flow and exhaust. Although the basic system remained the same, there were wide differences between designs, depending on where or by whom the engine was made. As higher steam pressures became available, steam leakage became more of a problem, and consequently oscillating engines fell from favor during the mid-19th century.

The ideal form of design was the direct-acting engine, where there was no intermediate moving machinery between the piston and the paddle shaft or paddlewheel crank apart from a single connecting rod. This “holy grail” of marine propulsion was first introduced by Marc Brunel (the father of Isambard Kingdom Brunel) in 1822 when he developed a system of inclined engines and pistons pointing directly at the crank, but this was considered too bulky a mechanism for practical use. His son perfected the design when the availability of higher steam pressure permitted the use of smaller cylinders. From 1860 this type of inclined engine became increasingly popular, and was adopted by several late-war blockade runners.

By this stage the first compound engine had been developed, where steam was expanded in two stages, in two different cylinders (one high-pressure and the other a smaller low-pressure version). After the Civil War this led to the triple-expansion engine which became the standard type of marine engine by the close of the century, albeit one which became linked with screw rather than sidewheel propulsion. The standard variant used in blockade runners was the “diagonal” engine, where the cylinders were mounted behind and below the paddlewheel shaft, inclined at an angle of around 15 degrees. With the “double-acting” system, waste steam was vented into a seawater-cooled condenser, then circulated back into the boiler, which increased efficiency. This venting of steam created a vacuum, which helped improve the “pull” of the piston, and increased its effectiveness. Usually the paddlewheel shafts of both sidewheels were connected, and turned at the same speed, but if required they could be disconnected, so that each engine could run independently, either in

**The small iron-hulled British-built sidewheel steamer *Merrimac* became a blockade runner, making two successful trips into Wilmington before she was captured in late June 1863. She was acquired by the US Navy and used in the blockading squadrons until she foundered in 1865. (US Naval Historical Center, Washington, DC)**

forward or reverse drive. Engines of this type were capable of producing around 150hp, although some oscillating engines could produce double this power (300–350hp), but these larger engines meant increased weight, increased displacement, and speed loss.

The 1860s were a time of great technical innovation, and it seemed as if every new ship which was launched had better, faster, and more compact engines than the one before. While some blockade runners used screw propulsion, this remained relatively uncommon, as by the 1860s, in identical conditions the paddlewheel still produced a greater sustainable speed through the water than its rival. The archetypal blockade runner was therefore a sidewheel steamer, albeit one with a particularly powerful and compact pair of engines. Every method was used: beam engines, oscillating engines and various types of direct acting engines. The propulsion system was a reflection of what was available, and represented a balance between power and weight which made the Civil War blockade runners virtually unique in maritime history. These sleek vessels were the fastest steamships of their day, and therefore represented the latest word in marine propulsion. Like the drug-smuggling “cigarette” speedboats of the late 20th century, they were created for a specific purpose, where speed equated to success and survival.

## **THE OPERATION OF BLOCKADE RUNNERS**

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### **The blockade-running ports**

The primary role of the blockade runner was to export cotton, and return through the Union blockade with a cargo of essential supplies, usually war materials. This meant that cotton had to be brought to the blockade-running ports, and military supplies had to be transported from these ports to depots, from there to be distributed to the Confederate armies. This usually meant that the best blockade-running ports were ones which were served by good rail links. As the Union blockade tightened, it became increasingly important that these ports were also well defended and, ideally, that they possessed more than one passage in and out of the port, giving blockade runners the opportunity to choose the best route through the line of patrolling Union warships.

The Union presence at Hampton Roads meant that Norfolk and other ports in Virginia were unsuitable for blockade runners. Also, the capture of the Outer Banks and the small port of Beaufort made the inland waters of North Carolina off-limits to blockade runners. To the south, the deep-water port of Wilmington on the Cape Fear River provided an ideal base, and had excellent rail communications. Two channels connected the Cape Fear River to the Atlantic: the main channel, called the Old Inlet, and the smaller New Inlet, located a few miles to the north of the main channel. Better still, the port was protected by a number of forts, the largest being Fort Fisher, regarded as the most powerful fort on the Confederate coast. By 1863, Wilmington had become the principal blockade-running port in the Confederacy.

The next port with good rail communications was Charleston, South Carolina, the Confederacy’s largest Atlantic seaport. Protected by a string of forts, the deep-water harbor could be entered through one of two main

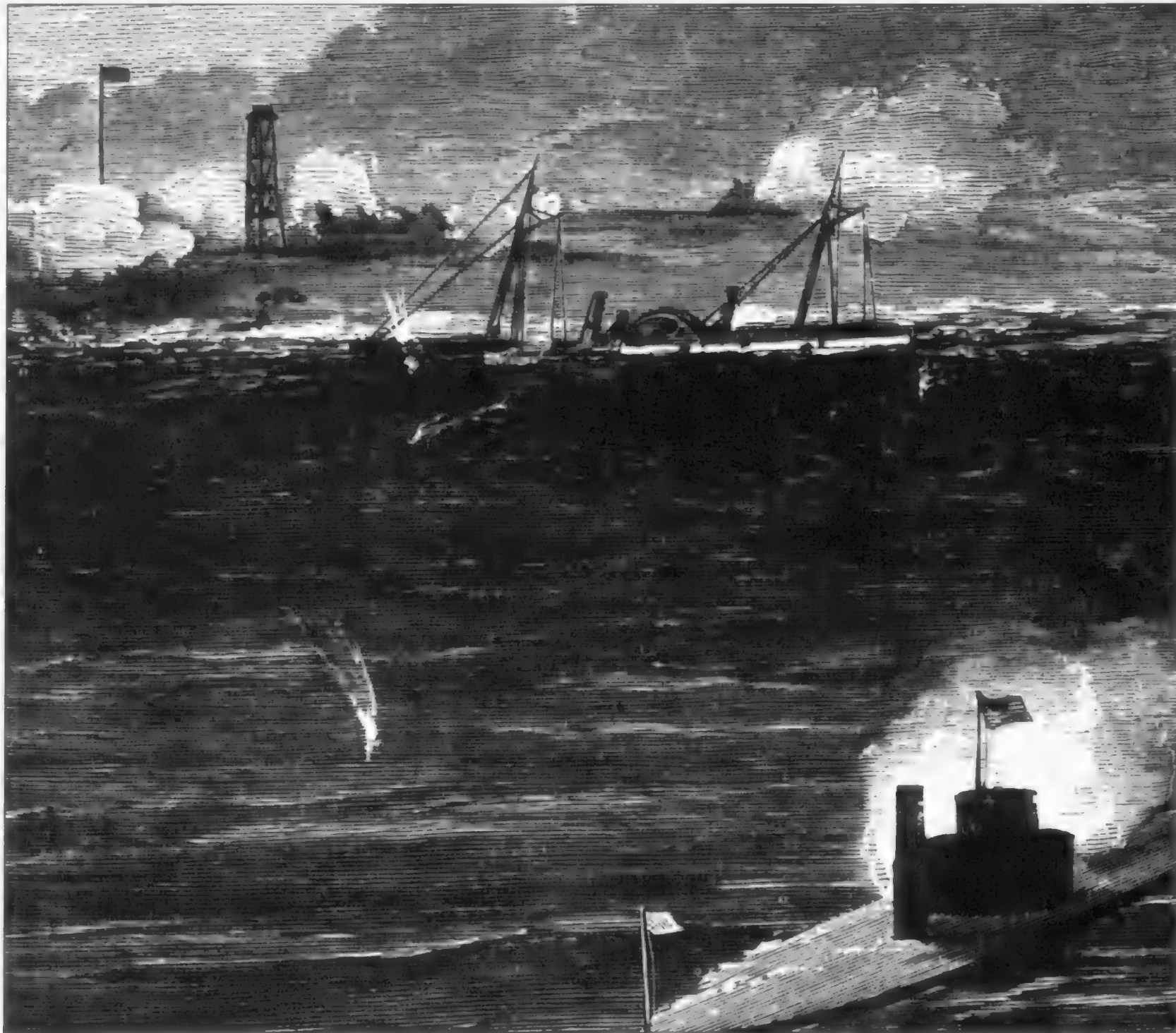




channels, the Main Ship Channel and Maffitt's Channel, named after the Confederate naval officer and blockade runner. By 1864, the Union blockade of Charleston had become so strong that blockade-running operations out of the city were well-nigh impossible. Further to the south was Savannah, which possessed good rail communications, but the capture of Fort Pulaski guarding the Savannah River effectively bottled up any blockade runners in the port. Florida boasted a handful of small harbors, but the transport infrastructure in the state was poor, and only St Marks, in Florida's north-west corner, proved suitable for blockade runners. Pensacola was denied to the Confederacy by the presence of Union troops there, but 40 miles to the west the Alabama port of Mobile provided a secure base, and was well served by railroads. Unfortunately the entrance to Mobile Bay was guarded by a powerful blockading squadron for much of the war, due to the presence of Confederate naval units in the bay. Further round the Gulf of Mexico, New Orleans on the Mississippi Delta was the largest port in the Confederacy, and was linked by water and rail with the interior. Unfortunately, the capture of the city by Union forces in April 1862 not only ended any blockade-running from Louisiana, but also cut the Confederacy in two, severing transport links between the eastern and western parts of the Confederacy. This meant that, although the port

**Running the gauntlet: The island of Bermuda, and Nassau in the Bahamas were the favored destinations of blockade runners during the war due to their proximity to the seaboard of the Carolinas. Havana in Cuba was also popular, but its importance declined following the capture of New Orleans in April 1862, and the close blockade of Galveston and Mobile. (Author's collection)**

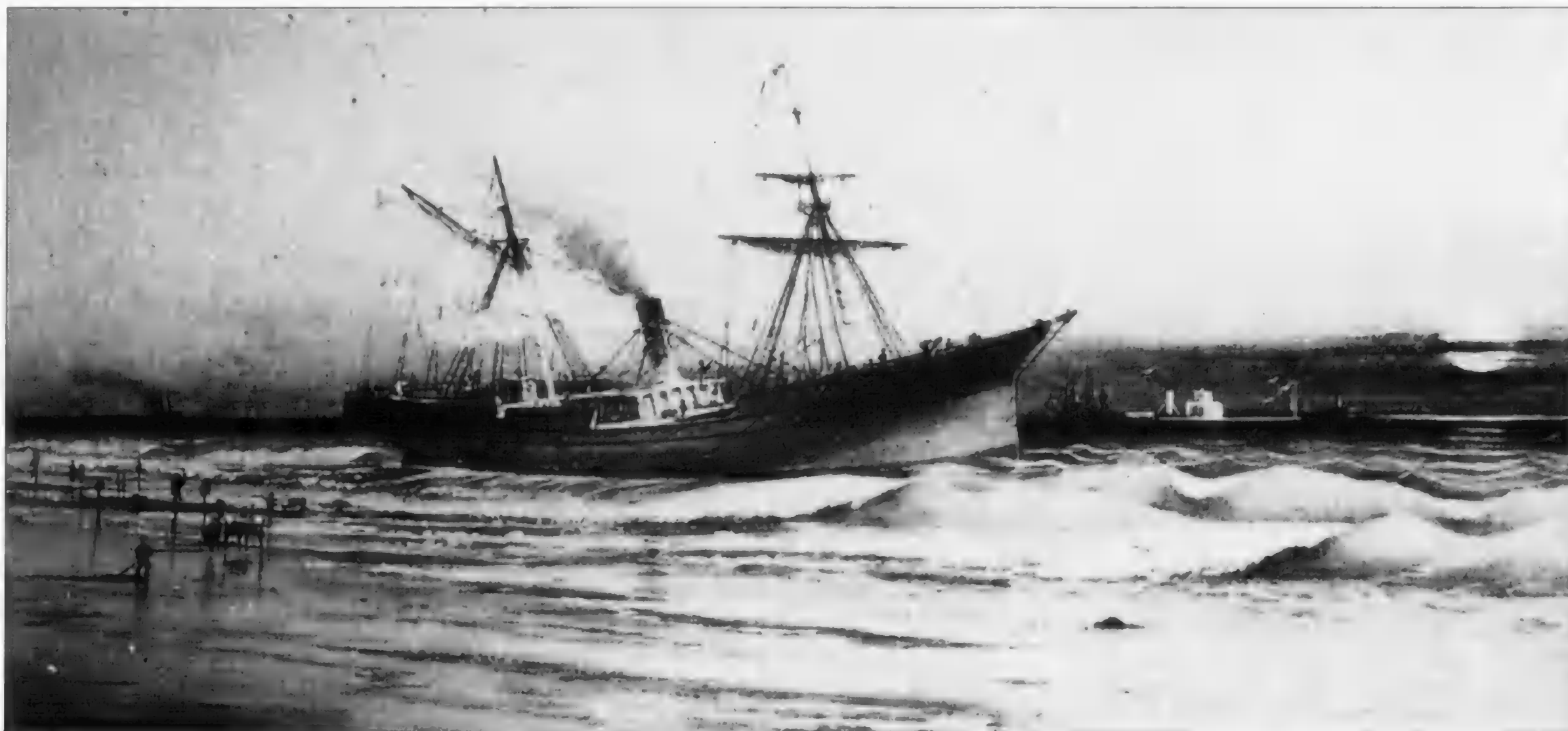
The Union monitor *Weehawken* in the process of driving a Confederate blockade runner ashore, under the guns of Sullivan's Island, near Charleston, South Carolina. While most of the warships of the blockading squadron were wooden-hulled vessels, a squadron of monitors was also stationed off Charleston to contain the Confederate ironclads in the port. (Stratford Archive, London)



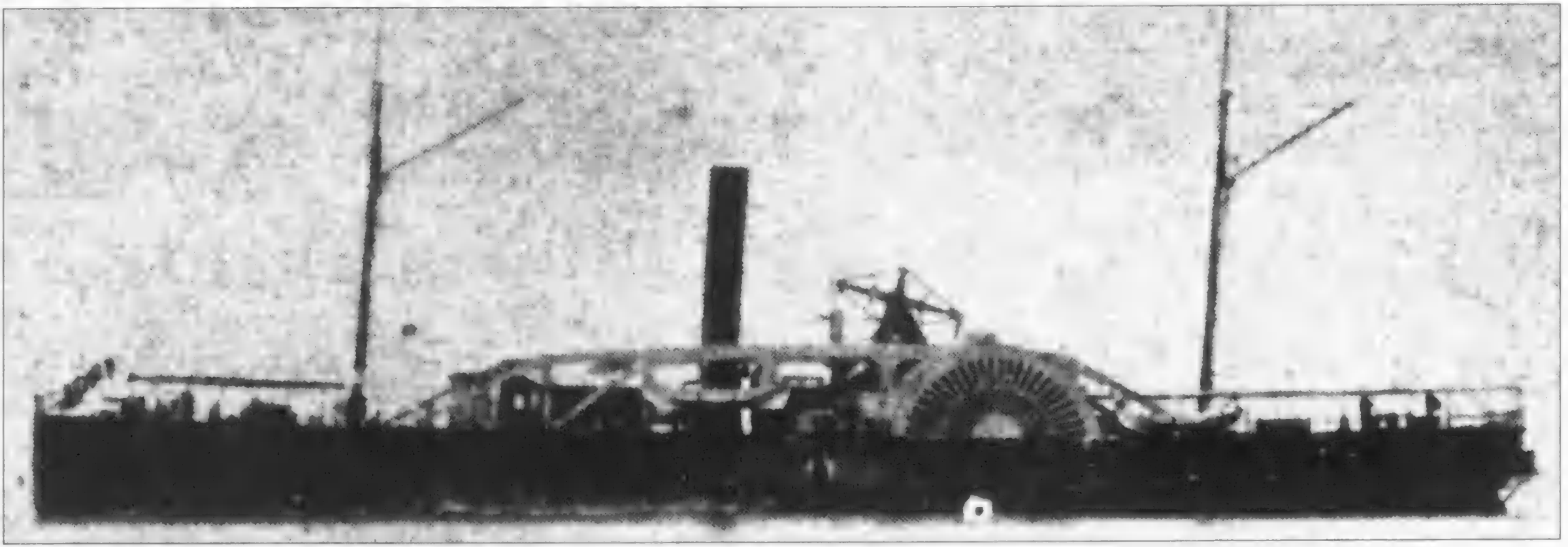
The British-built screw-powered blockade runner *Modern Greece* was forced ashore on the North Carolina coast near Fort Fisher, at the mouth of the Cape Fear River, in 1863. The garrison of the fort managed to salvage most of her cargo. (North Carolina Maritime Museum, Beaufort, NC)

of Galveston in Texas was well suited for use by blockade runners, war materials landed there could not be shipped to the main theaters of war.

Blockade runners were extremely well paid, averaging 10–20 times the wages of other seamen during the period, and the men were paid after each successful trip. This meant the sailors had money to burn, and slowly the ports used by blockade runners adapted to serve the needs of these men. In particular, while pre-war Wilmington was regarded as a genteel, well-heeled town, it soon took on aspects of a rough-and-tumble and crime-ridden port, with brothels, drinking dens and gambling







houses springing up, turning the town into what one contemporary visitor described as “the meanest place in the Confederacy.”

The social cost might have been high, but the transformation of these ports into blockade-running centers was vital to the Confederate cause. During 1863 some 150 Confederate blockade-running trips were made into Wilmington, and 117 sorties out of the port, attempted by just over 50 different vessels. This was a fivefold increase over the previous year, and indicates both the increasing popularity of Wilmington as a blockade-running port, and the greater number of vessels willing to take the risk. Over the same period there were 45 successful runs into Charleston, and 49 sorties from the port; 22 different vessels were involved and, in almost all cases, Charleston vessels ran into and out of Nassau. During the same year, only one blockade runner entered Savannah (the *Herald*, a highly successful Charleston-based vessel), and that was only because she was being pursued by Union warships. Apart from the *Herald*, only four other vessels sailed from Savannah during 1863, and of these two were lost or captured. Six blockade runners operated out of St Marks during the year and, of these, three were captured or forced aground. The presence of a large Union squadron off Mobile effectively sealed off the Alabama port, and only 17 vessels ran in through the blockade during the year, and of the 25 vessels which tried to run out through the blockade bound for Havana, seven were captured. Only the *Alice* (renamed the *Matagorda*) operated from Galveston, making two return trips to Havana. Clearly Wilmington had overtaken Charleston as the main blockade-running port and, while the numbers of vessels making the runs through the blockade increased during the year, so too did the number of vessels captured or destroyed.

During 1864 the numbers increased. Approximately 40–45 runs through the blockade were made into and out of Wilmington during each quarter of 1864, representing a slight increase in numbers. This bald statistic hides the fact that the number of individual ships dropped through capture and loss, while some ships made a greater number of runs. During this same period only 30–35 successful runs were made into and out of Charleston in the entire year, less than a quarter of the traffic into and out of Wilmington. The number of vessels being captured off Charleston was also increasing steadily. A similar situation was encountered at Mobile, where the tight Union blockade meant that only 20 successful arrivals and 19 departures were logged during 1864. A

**The sidewheel steamer *Magnolia* was built in New York in 1854, and converted into a blockade runner in New Orleans during 1861. After her capture in February 1862 she was commissioned into the US Navy as a gunboat, and went on to capture five blockade runners. (Clyde Hensley Collection, Fernandina, FL)**



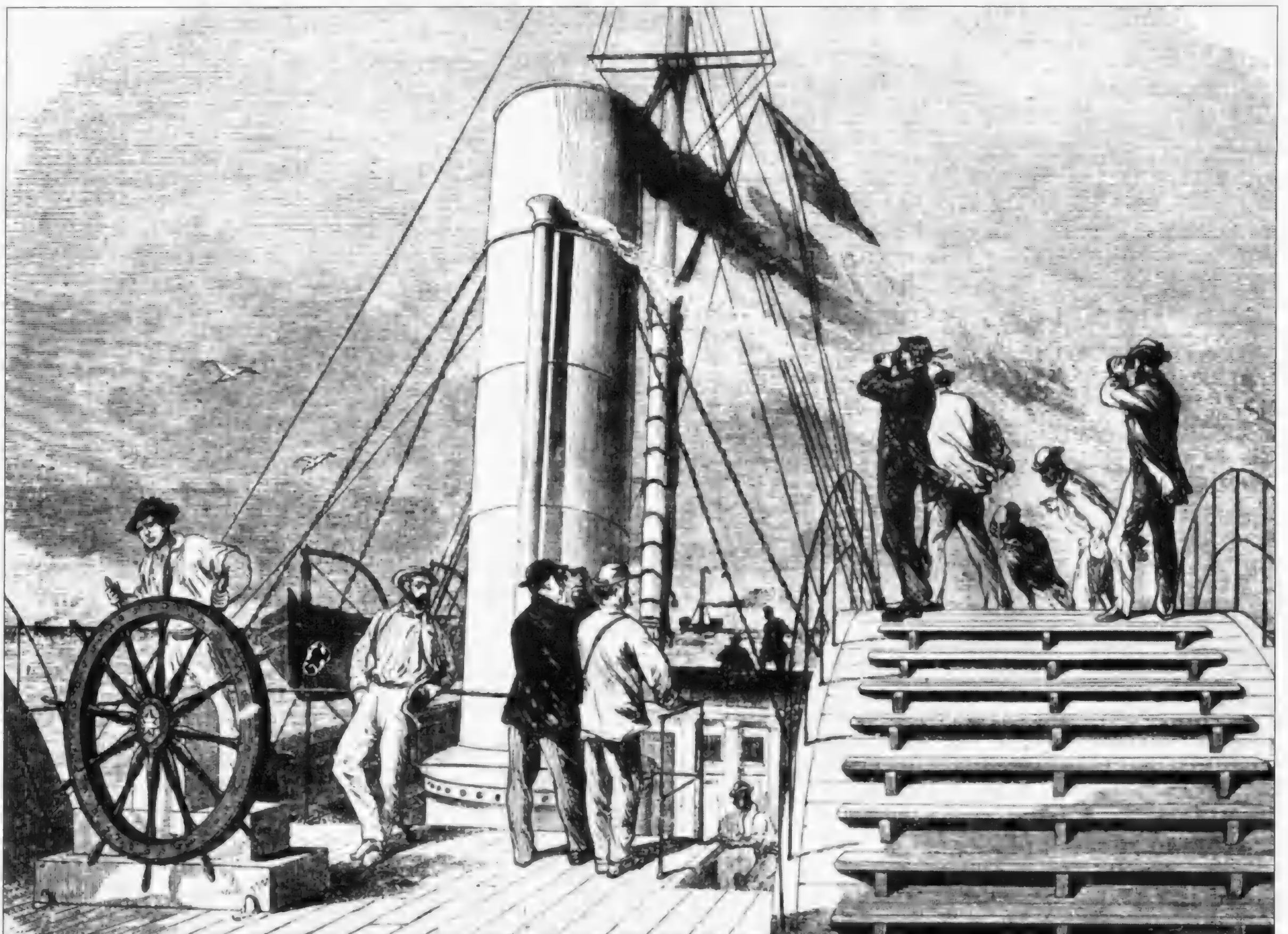
similar number of runs was made into and out of Galveston, but the port only really prospered as a viable blockade-running base after the fall of Wilmington.

Around 25 blockade-running sorties were made into Wilmington during the two months before the fall of Fort Fisher (January 25, 1865), and a slightly larger number of runs were made out of the port to Havana. From this number it can be seen that the Union pressure on the Confederacy tightened steadily throughout the war, and influenced the traffic through the blockade-running ports. Charleston gradually lost business to Wilmington due to the tightening of the blockade, while other Southern ports were closed to blockade runners when they fell to Union troops. The loss of Fort Fisher in January 1865, and the surrender of Wilmington five weeks later effectively ended blockade running, and the handful of vessels which switched to Galveston were not numerous enough to help the Confederacy survive.

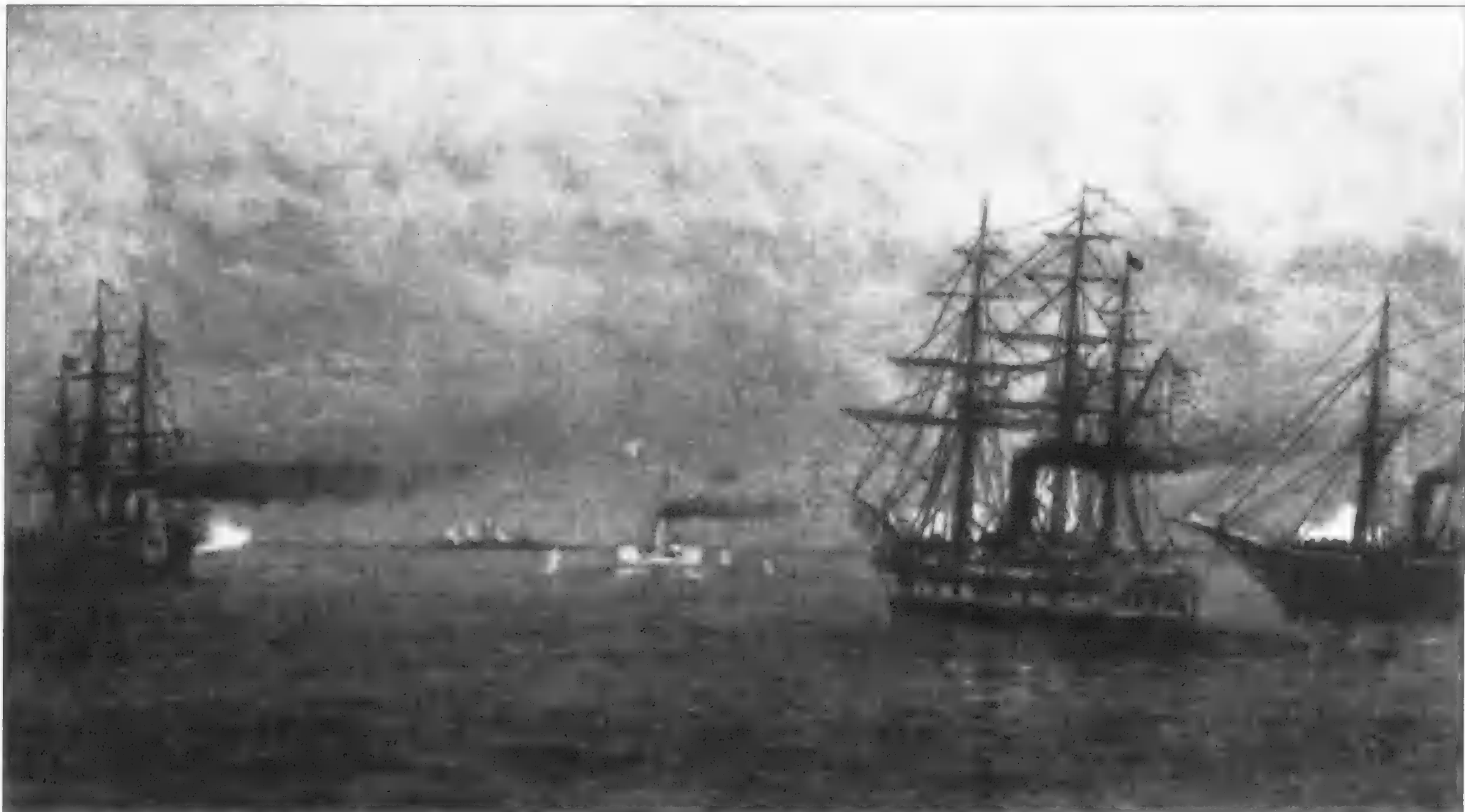
Captain Maffitt shown using the vantage point of his port sidewheel box as he scans the horizon for signs of the Union blockade during his approach to Wilmington from Bermuda in the blockade runner *Lillian*, May 1864. (Stratford Archive, London)

### Blockade runners in action

While the scope of this book makes it impossible to list all the blockade runners which operated during the war, or to describe their careers, we can look at the general *modus operandi* of these vessels, and examine illustrative examples of blockade-running operations. For anyone interested in a detailed listing of all known blockade runners, Wise's *Lifeline of the Confederacy* is the best source. For further examples of blockade-running







operations by individual ships, Carr's *Gray Phantoms of the Cape Fear* includes several fascinating examples, while the account of Thomas E. Taylor, the supercargo of the *Banshee* (reprinted 1995) provides a wealth of detail on blockade-runner operations.

The way a vessel was converted into a blockade runner has already been described. In addition to their structural appearance, blockade runners were also painted to make them blend in to their surroundings, an early form of naval camouflage. It was common to paint the hulls, superstructure, smokestacks and masts of blockade runners in colors which would either make them difficult to see at night, or against the local waters of the ports from which they operated. The ideal color for this was light or medium gray, although various shades of light blue, pale (duck-egg) green, cream and sandy beige were also used. Lighter colors were believed to be best to hide the ship at night, although pure white was deemed too visible due to its starkness.

One of the most colorful accounts of the effectiveness of this camouflage was provided by a blockade runner which was anchored off Cape Fear's Old Inlet, waiting for a chance to run through the blockade. At dusk a Union gunboat appeared and anchored less than 100 yards away. It remained there until night had fallen, then raised its anchor and steamed off. The well-camouflaged blockade runner was never spotted.

Blockade-running tactics amounted to a duel of wits between the two sides. Blockade-running captains would usually wait for a moonless night, and ideally a favorable tide, to mask the vessel, and to speed it on its way. Other favorable conditions were during heavy rainstorms, in mist, or even when the attention of Union captains was distracted by the pursuit of another blockade runner. Local pilots were embarked, and their knowledge of the constantly shifting channels and sandbars off the blockade-running ports was crucial to the success of the enterprise. Union warships usually operated along patrol lines, beginning with a

**The Clyde-built blockade runner *Will o' the Wisp*, commanded by Captain Peter Capper, running through the Union fleet into Wilmington, 1863. She was badly damaged in the attempt, and her captain ran her ashore at full speed to prevent her from sinking. (Stratford Archive, London)**

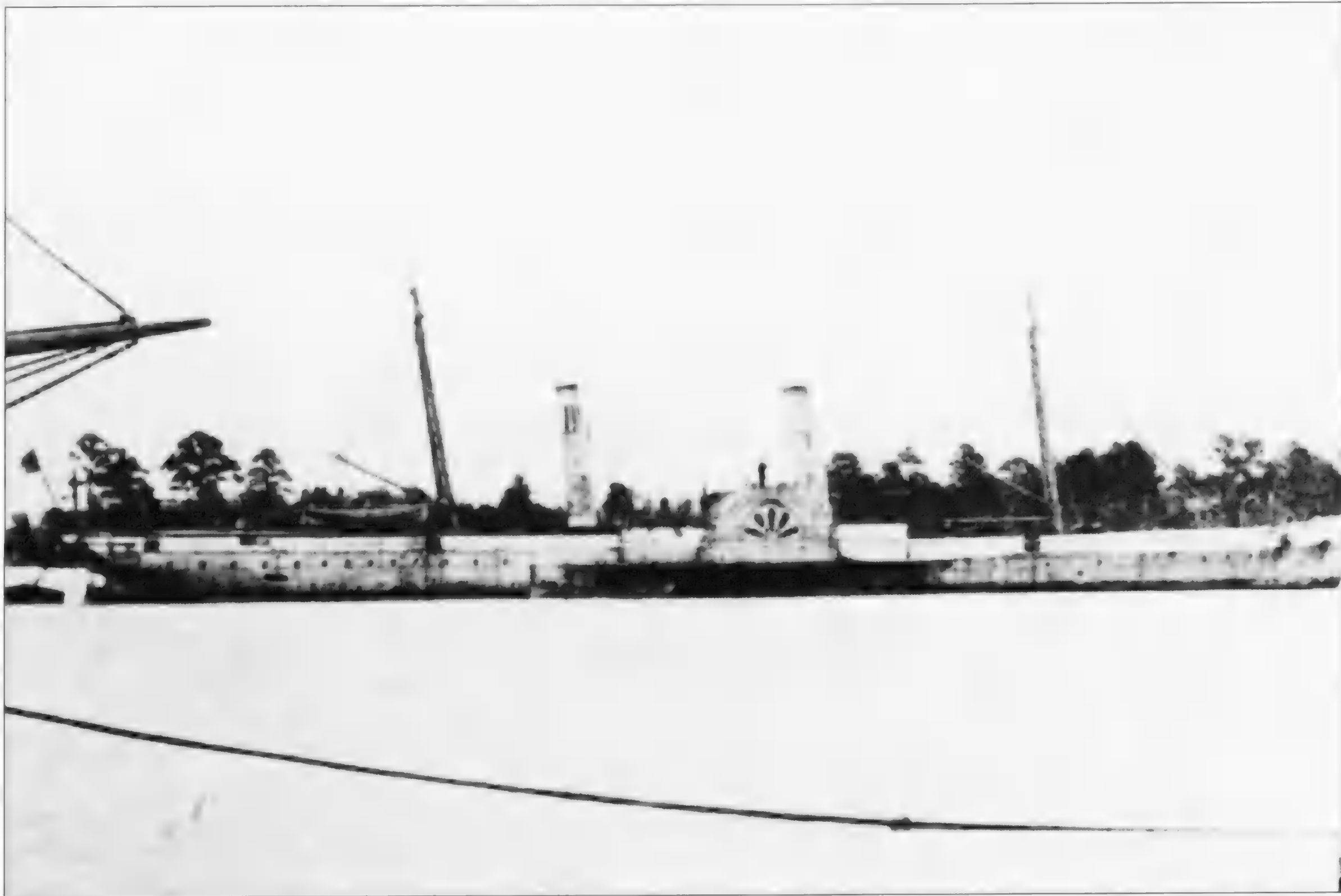
line of launches and small gunboats close inshore, then a line of larger gunboats further out to sea. These inshore patrol lines were withdrawn at dawn, as they operated within range of enemy batteries. The main Union patrol line was located about two or three miles out to sea, beyond the maximum range of Confederate coastal guns. Patrolling warships steamed along an arc, and waited for one of the inshore vessels to report a contact. Once a blockade runner was sighted, flares were fired, their color and direction indicating the course the blockade runner was steering. Designated Union warships would then steer a course to intercept. The superior speed of most blockade runners over their adversaries meant that, unless the Union commander was very fortunate, they would be able to steam through a gap in the blockading line and escape, often without being seen. Once through the lines of Union warships, the blockade runner was still not safe from capture. Union cruisers patrolled the waters of the Florida Straits and the Bahamas Channel, hoping to intercept blockade runners on the high seas. From late 1863 on, Union patrol lines were also established immediately outside the territorial waters of the Bahamas, Cuba, and occasionally Bermuda.

If a blockade runner was spotted and a Union warship gave chase, Confederate forts and shore batteries would usually open up in an attempt to support the escape of the Confederate vessel. Union warships were willing to fire on a chase to stop her, but they were usually reluctant to sink an enemy vessel, as her capture resulted in a huge financial reward for the blockading captain and crew. In some instances blockade runners were driven ashore, in which case Confederate soldiers and mobile artillery batteries would race to the area to cover the stranded

**The wreck of the blockade runner *Colt* off Sullivan's Island, near Charleston, SC, photographed in 1865. Dozens of blockade runners were lost through running aground in the shifting sands and banks of the Carolina coast, and their wrecks served as navigation aids for subsequent blockade runners making the same run. (Library of Congress)**







vessel, and every attempt would be made to rescue the cargo, if not the vessel itself. In these cases, Union warships usually fired on the stranded vessel, hoping to set her and her cargo ablaze.

Blockade runners were unarmed. Since their crews were civilians, any attempt to return the fire of Union warships was to invite trial and execution if captured. Instead, captains had to rely on their own wits and skill to evade their pursuers, and in the speed of their superb vessels. Numerous examples of the use of stealth during daylight approaches can be found, but blockade-running captains usually preferred to make their voyages at night, either skirting the coast or else heading directly through the concentric lines of the blockading squadron. Whatever strategy was chosen, the blockade runners knew the risks they were taking, and realized that capture meant temporary imprisonment (incarceration for the duration of the war if a Southerner), the seizure of ship and cargo, and possibly even financial ruin.

An example of this battle of wits is provided by the account of Lieutenant John Wilkinson, commanding the blockade runner *Giraffe* (renamed the *Robert E. Lee* after her arrival in Wilmington) on behalf of the Ordnance Bureau. After leaving Nassau, Wilkinson headed east-north-east into the Bahamas Channel, where a tropical storm protected him from Union cruisers. On December 29, 1862, he made his approach to Wilmington from the north-east. His reasoning was that his course followed the direction of Union naval traffic between Cape Fear and the Union-held naval base at Beaufort, so an approach from this quarter would be unexpected. To disguise his ship, he hoisted the Union flag, hoping that, with luck, his vessel would be taken for a captured blockade

**The *Giraffe* was built at Clydebank in 1860 for use as a Glasgow to Belfast packet. After her conversion into a blockade runner in 1862, she was renamed the *Robert E. Lee*. She made 14 successful blockade-running trips before being captured off Beaufort, North Carolina, in November 1863. She subsequently became the USS *Fort Donelson*. (North Carolina Maritime Museum, Beaufort, NC)**

runner which had been taken into service as a Union gunboat. He followed a group of Union supply boats and managed to slip through the outer line of Union blockaders without being challenged. Once within reach of the New Inlet, Wilkinson increased the speed of his ship, dashing through a gap in the inner patrol line to reach the safety of the Cape Fear River.

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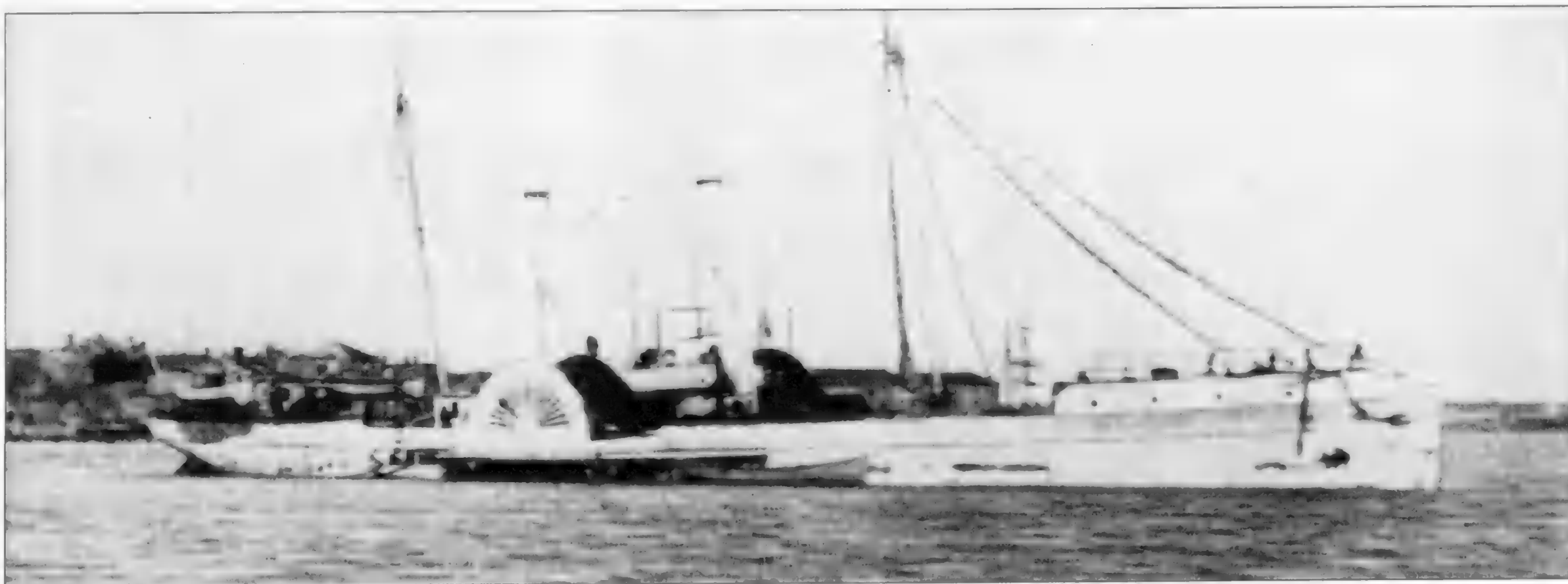
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**The blockade runner *Atalanta* was built in London in 1863 for use as a cross-Channel ferry running between Britain and France. Instead she was turned into a blockade runner, successfully making an initial trip into Wilmington, SC. She was then purchased by the Confederate Navy, which converted her into the commerce raider CSS *Tallahassee*. (North Carolina Maritime Museum, Beaufort, NC)**







## A: CONVERTED BLOCKADE RUNNERS

### A1: *Advance*

Built at Greenock in Scotland by Caird & Co., this sleek blockade runner began life as the schooner-rigged sidewheel steam packet *Lord Clyde*. Launched in July 1862, she measured 230ft long, had a 26-ft beam, and a draft of 12ft. She was capable of speeds of up to 12 knots. She was purchased by the shipping firm of Power, Low & Company, which operated her in partnership with the state of North Carolina.

She is sometimes erroneously referred to as the *A.D. Vance*, a name which was never used in contemporary documents, and which confuses the ship name with that of the State Governor who supported her operation. Commanded by Lieutenant Tom Crossan of the Confederate Navy, she made 17 successful round-trip voyages from Wilmington to either Nassau or Bermuda before she was captured off the mouth of the Cape Fear River by the USS *Santiago de Cuba* on September 10, 1864. She was subsequently taken into Union service as the gunboat USS *Advance*.

### A2: *Margaret & Jessie*

The steel sidewheel steamer *Douglas* was built at Robert Napier & Sons' yard on Clydeside in Scotland in early 1858, for use as a packet steamer running between Liverpool and the Isle of Man. She was 211ft long, with a 26-ft beam and a draft of 10ft. Her sidewheel engines gave her a very respectable maximum speed of 15 knots, and when she was first built she was lauded as the fastest steamer in the world. In November 1862, she was purchased for use as a blockade runner, and made her first voyage to Charleston, slipping through the Union blockade to enter the port in late January 1863. She was then renamed the *Margaret & Jessie*, and made 18 more voyages between the Confederate seaboard and Nassau, five from Charleston and three from Wilmington. She was finally captured on her 20th return voyage on November 5, 1863, by the USS *Nansemond* while trying to slip into Wilmington. Taken into Union service as the USS *Gettysburg*, she ended the war as part of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron, stationed as a "chaser" off Wilmington.

This unidentified British blockade runner was captured off Wilmington in December 1864. She is still flying the British mercantile "red ensign" from her stern and an unidentified flag from her mainmast. Note the traces of collision damage to her starboard side. (Clyde Hensley Collection, Fernandina, FL)

## B: RUNNING THE BLOCKADE OFF WILMINGTON, 1864

The location of Wilmington near the mouth of the Cape Fear River made it an ideal blockade-running port. Its rail links and proximity to the armies in Tennessee and Virginia made it ideal for the supply of the Confederate Army, while its location also allowed the easy trans-shipment of cotton from the Deep South to the Carolina coast. Even more important, the port was protected by Fort Fisher and other works such as Fort Caswell, and the garrisons did what they could to support blockade-running operations.

This close support is evident in this scene, which shows the government-owned blockade runner *Owl* attempting to slip out of Wilmington on the night of October 3/4, 1864. The British-built sidewheel steamer had entered the port on her maiden voyage the previous month, and was then turned over to Captain John Newland Maffitt of the Confederate Navy. Therefore, when she made the attempt shown here, she was commanded by one of the most experienced officers available.

When the *Owl* reached the mouth of the Cape Fear River she headed south, but was spotted by the tug *Berberry*, which maneuvered to block the blockade runner's route back into the river and fired signal rockets to alert the rest of the fleet. Both the *Berberry* and the gunboat USS *Nippon* opened fire, hitting the *Owl* and wounding Maffitt and several of his crew. The damage was insufficient to stop the blockade runner, and she managed to pull away from her pursuers in the darkness. During the action the *Nippon* fired 20 shots from her starboard battery, while the *Owl* fired a white flare, alerting the garrison of Fort Fisher, who opened up with covering fire.



Reports of the time mention that the sea was smooth, the weather was mild and visibility was good. Ensign Griffith, commanding the tug, reported that the Confederate blockade runner was long and low, with two stacks and no masts. Incidentally, observers also recorded that, unlike other blockade runners, the *Owl*'s hull was light red.

## C: THE BANSHEES

### C1: *Banshee* (I)

The *Banshee* was a purpose-built blockade runner, built by Jones, Quiggin & Co. of Liverpool in the summer of 1863. She was 214ft long, with a 20-ft beam and an 8-ft draft, and her hull was built from steel, making her one of the first ever steel-hulled merchantmen. On her maiden voyage, in January 1863, damage incurred to her light decking meant that she had to be strengthened, but she was soon ready for service as a fast-steaming blockade runner. With a top speed of up to 15 knots, she could outpace most of the Union fleet. She operated on the Nassau to Wilmington run, and under the command of Captain Joseph W. Steele she made 14 voyages in and out of Wilmington before her luck ran out. She was captured by the USS *James Adger* on her 15th voyage as she tried to run into Wilmington on November 21, 1863. She subsequently served in the Union blockading squadron as a "chaser."

### C2: *Banshee* (II)

According to Thomas Taylor, a supercargo for the Liverpool-based Edward Laurence & Co., the *Banshee* (II) was the best blockade runner ever designed. Built under order by the Glasgow yard of William Denny & Brothers, the *Banshee* (II) was 252ft long, with a 31-ft beam, an 11-ft draft and a top speed of just under 16 knots. At 439 registered tons (627 gross tons) she was also larger than her earlier namesake.

She also ran between Nassau and Wilmington, but her cargo did not only include war supplies and luxury provisions, as she once carried an Arabian horse from Nassau for President Jefferson Davis. By late 1864 she had transferred to the Galveston to Havana route, and continued her operations until the end of the war, when she was taken to Liverpool and sold.

## D: COLONEL LAMB

One of the most stylish blockade runners of the war, the *Colonel Lamb* was owned and operated by the Confederate Navy. She was ordered by James Bulloch, the Confederate Navy's representative in Britain, and designed to incorporate all the features considered important in a blockade runner. She was built by Jones, Quiggin & Company of Liverpool during 1864, immediately after the construction of her near-sister, the government blockade runner *Hope*.

The two ships differed slightly in that the *Hope* had a "turtleback" foredeck to improve her seakeeping qualities and had a slightly narrower beam and shallower draft. Both were steel-hulled, and the slight difference in size meant that the *Colonel Lamb* was the largest steel-hulled vessel of her day. She was named after the garrison commander of Fort Fisher, Colonel William Lamb, who worked closely with the Wilmington-based blockade runner captains. The *Colonel Lamb* was christened by the wife of the new vessel's first commander, the experienced blockade runner Captain Tom Lockwood.

Designed to operate on the run between Nassau in the Bahamas and Wilmington, SC, she made just one successful voyage before the Confederate port fell in late February 1865. She survived the war, and was sold to a Liverpool company in 1865, only to be destroyed in an accidental explosion while at anchor off the port 11 years later.

## E: MID-WAR BLOCKADE RUNNERS

### E1: *Lizzie* (II)

The *Lizzie* was a purpose-built steel-hulled blockade runner, constructed on Glasgow's Clydeside for Henderson, Coulborn & Co., who operated a number of blockade runners. Her reported length was 230ft, but with just a 20-ft beam she was extremely streamlined, making her capable of

**The British-built sidewheel steamer *Banshee* (II) was probably the first purpose-built blockade runner. During the war she made 14 successful blockade-running voyages. (North Carolina Maritime Museum, Beaufort, NC)**







speeds of up to 20 knots. She was also shallow-drafted, drawing less than 7ft, which allowed her to pass over the bars outside Galveston and Wilmington.

She arrived in Havana in October 1864, and it was planned to operate her between the Cuban port and Galveston, Texas. There is no evidence to suggest that she successfully ran the blockade before the war ended. Despite this she was considered a perfect example of her genre. The original blockade runner *Lizzie* was a diminutive 89-ft vessel which made two trips between Wilmington and Nassau before being caught. On July 15, 1863, the original *Lizzie* was captured off the eastern coast of Florida by the USS *Santiago de Cuba*, which was busy hunting for Confederate raiders in the Bahama Straits. She was sent into Key West as a prize, where her cargo was found to contain brandy, sugar and general provisions.

## **E2: William G. Hewes**

Built in Wilmington, Delaware, in 1860 by the Harland & Hollingsworth Yard for the Southern Steamship Company, the *William G. Hewes* was seized in New Orleans when Louisiana seceded from the Union. She was 240ft long, had a 33-ft beam and a draft of 9ft. It is estimated that her top speed was around 12 knots. It was originally planned that she would become a Mississippi "cottonclad" gunboat, but in early 1862 she was handed over to Captain Smith of Louisiana and became a blockade runner. She transported 1,400 bales of cotton to Havana shortly before the fall of New Orleans, and then she eventually continued to operate between Havana and Galveston. She was re-named the *Ella & Annie* in the summer of 1863, by which time she had been switched to the Nassau to Wilmington run. She was eventually captured off New Inlet, NC, by the USS *Nippon* on November 9, 1863. She subsequently became the USS *Malvern*, and was the flagship of Admiral Porter during his attack on Fort Fisher in December 1864.

## **F: ARIES AND THE USS STETTIN, MARCH 1863**

The iron-hulled screw steamer *Aries* was built in Sir James Laing's Shipyard at Sunderland in north-east England during 1861–62, and was launched in February 1862. Although not designed as a blockade runner, she was reasonably well suited to the role, although with a draft of 16ft she was too large to cross the Wilmington bar. She was sold to a London shipowner, Frederick Obicino, who elected to use her to run the blockade. She made her first run from Nassau to Charleston in November 1862, and managed to slip into the port undetected. Just over a month later, in late December,

**The wreck of the British-built blockade runner *Bendigo*, which was run aground off the coast of North Carolina during a failed attempt to enter Wilmington. Her lower hull has been protected by sand, but her exposed upper works have decayed. (North Carolina Maritime Museum, Beaufort, NC)**

she passed through the Charleston blockade again, and made for Havana with 740 tons of cotton on board. There Obicino sold her to the Cuban shipping company of Vincente Malga, who retained her crew and continued to use her as a blockade runner. Her next run was made in March 1863, and she was loaded with a cargo of Cuban rum. This time everything went wrong.

Shortly after midnight on March 28, the gunboat USS *Stettin*, commanded by Acting Master Devens, was at anchor off Bull's Bay, some 30 miles north of Charleston Harbor. At 12.45hrs lookouts spotted a steamer to westward, trying to slip southward by hugging the shore. Devens got his ship under way and moved inshore to intercept the blockade runner, firing on her as he approached. He lost sight of her in the darkness and, finding the water was shoaling fast, he anchored in three fathoms (18ft/5.5m), blocking the entrance of the bay.

Dawn revealed that the blockade runner had gone aground by the stern off Petrel Bank (White Bank), a marshy area on the north side of Bull's Bay. Devens lowered two boats and led a boarding party to take control of the stranded blockade runner. He managed to free her from the bank and take her into the Union naval anchorage at Port Royal, SC, where Admiral Dupont described the *Aries* as, "the most perfect example of a blockade runner we have yet seen ... her masts lower in a peculiar way, invented for this very purpose." She was subsequently bought into US Navy service, becoming the gunboat USS *Aries*.

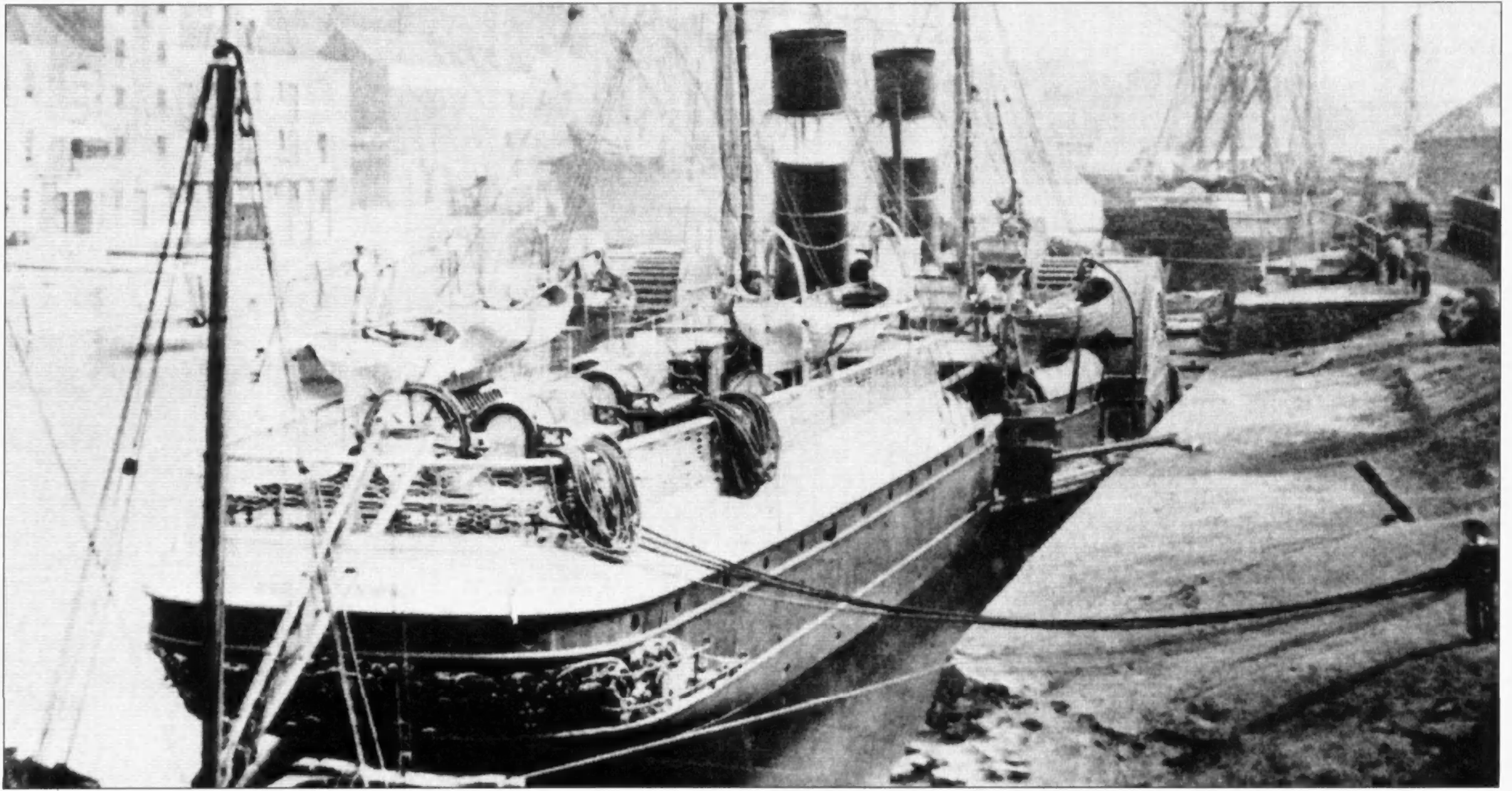
The plate shows Devens and his men approaching the stranded blockade runner, while the crew of the *Aries* pull for the shore.

## **G: GOVERNMENT-RUN BLOCKADE RUNNERS**

### **G1: Robert E. Lee**

Originally known as the *Giraffe*, this lean, fast vessel was built on Clydeside by the John Brown shipyard as a Glasgow to Belfast steam packet. She was 268ft long, with a 26-ft beam and a 12-ft draft, and her engines could achieve speeds of 13½ knots. She was bought by Alexander Collie & Co. of Manchester, then fitted out as a blockade runner. Before she





entered service the company sold her to the Confederate Navy, which renamed her, and used her as a government blockade runner. Her first voyage to Wilmington in January 1863 was followed by 20 more successful voyages. She was finally caught off Beaufort, North Carolina, on November 9, 1863, by the gunboat USS *James Adger*.

#### **G2: *Bat***

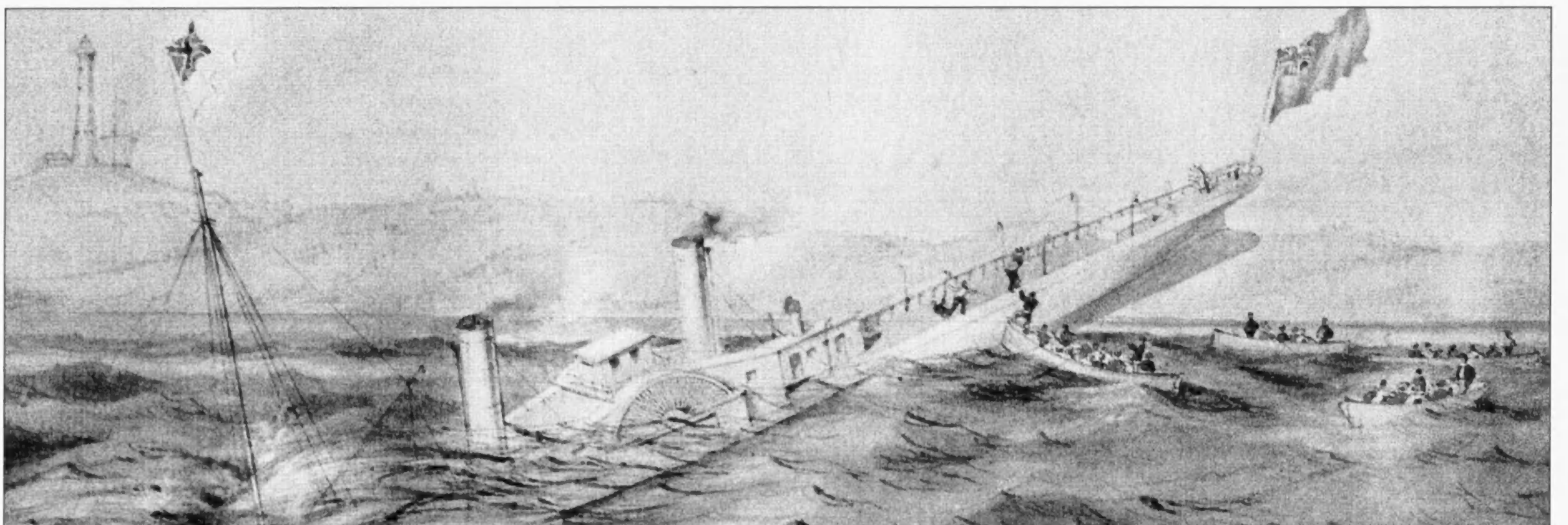
One of a class of four blockade runners designed for the Confederate government and operated by the Navy, the *Bat* was built by Jones, Quiggin & Company of Liverpool in the summer of 1864. Her sister ships were the *Stag*, *Owl*, and *Deer*. She was 230ft long, with a 26-ft beam and a draft of just 7ft 6in. Her sidewheel engines were capable of speeds of just under 16 knots, making the *Bat* speedy enough to outdistance most of her pursuers, and her coal (actually anthracite) bunkers were large enough to carry enough fuel for a return voyage from Bermuda to the Confederate seaboard.

Unfortunately she only made one trip, being captured off Wilmington on her maiden voyage during the closing stages

of a run south from Halifax, Nova Scotia. After failing to break through the blockade on the night of October 8–9, Captain Hora made a second attempt two nights later. This time she was intercepted and captured by the USS *Montgomery*. She was subsequently commissioned into the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron as a “chaser.”

**ABOVE** The Confederate blockade runner *Robert E. Lee*, commanded by senior Lieutenant John Wilkinson of the Confederate Navy, was a government-run vessel, and became one of the most successful blockade runners of the war. She was finally captured by the USS *James Adger* off Beaufort, North Carolina, on November 9, 1863. (Stratford Archive, London)

**BELOW** The British-built blockade runner *Mary Celestia* sinking off Gibbs Hill Light, Bermuda, in 1864, after striking a coral reef. The wreck was discovered and surveyed by an archeological team in the 1980s. (Bermuda Maritime Museum)





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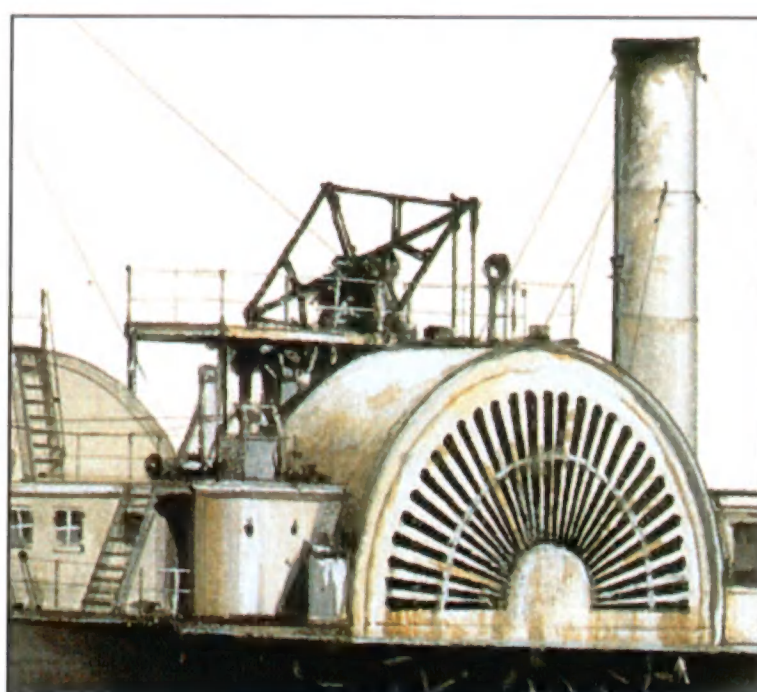
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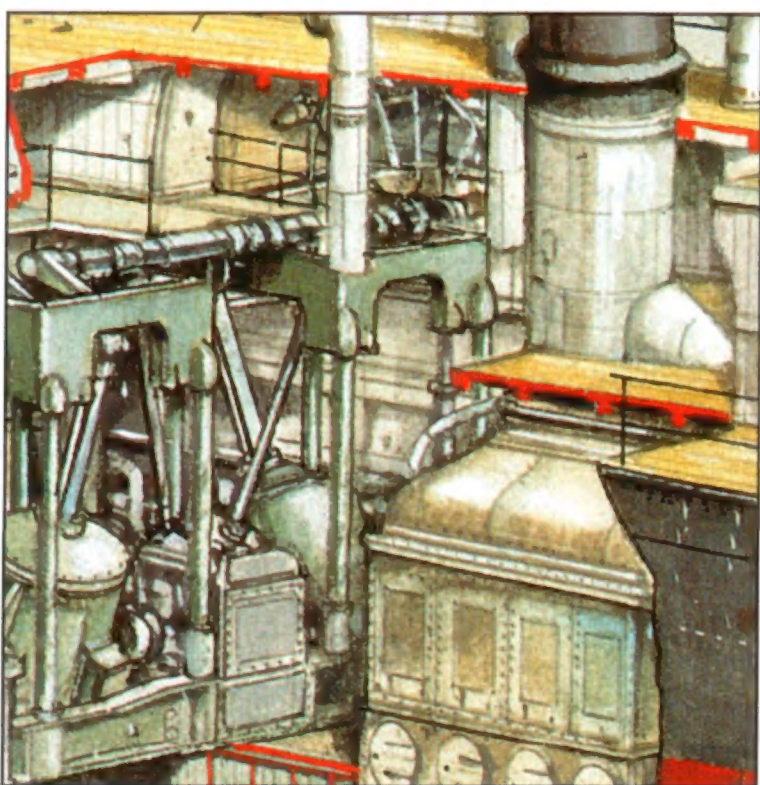
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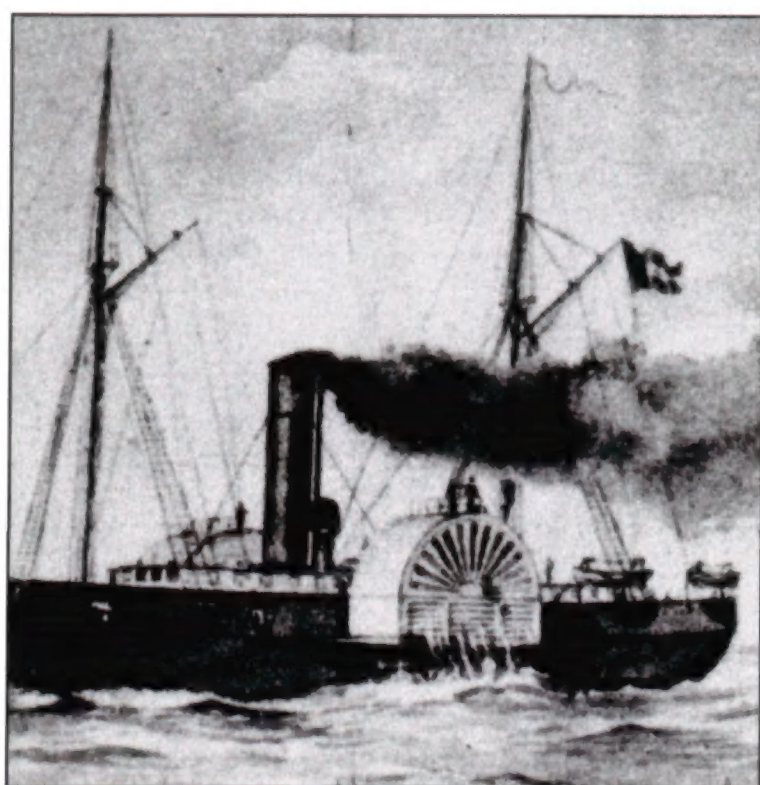
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